



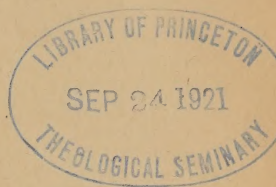
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The city temple pulpit

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THE
CITY TEMPLE PULPIT

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THE
CITY TEMPLE
PULPIT



SERMONS BY THE REV.
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THE CITY TEMPLE PULPIT

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, Thou dost make all things new. Thou hast made a new year in our little lives; Thou hast set us at the gate of a new opportunity; Thou hast opened out a new and extended field of service; Thou hast put a new song into the mouth of many. We will rejoice and be glad, for the dew of the morning is upon us, and behold, we are called anew to the obedience and the service of faith. We praise Thee and magnify Thee exceedingly. All the years that have gone have been so many witnesses to Thy goodness, Thy presence, Thy tender love; may the years not be wasted upon us, may we accept them as gifts from God, and make of them all we can by faithful devotion and service in the kingdom of Christ. We bless Thee for much of what we have seen of life; we leave its mysteries, its darkest places, its horrible caverns, and its wasteful wildernesses, but there is enough left to touch our best emotion of thankfulness and praise and love; we will think of the garden, and the flower, and the singing bird, and the child, and the joy exceeding, and for all these good gifts of Thine in Christ Jesus our Lord we would thank Thee with a song loud and sweet. We bless Thee that we care for Thy kingdom: once other gods had dominion over us, but Thou hast enabled us to renounce and despise them and banish them from our confidence and our imagination. We are now Thine, covenanted as such at the Cross, and Thou hast given unto us a decree and a charter stamped and endorsed by Thine own red seal: the foundation of the Lord standeth sure, having this seal. The Lord knoweth them that are His. Truly we have done the things we ought not to have done, and we have left undone the things we ought to have done; but still we love Thee, and we aspire after Thee, and we believe that by Thy condescending grace we shall at last fully secure Thee. Pity us, for we have been sorely tempted of the enemy; pity us, because Thou hast

made five gateways into our soul, and the enemy has forced them all ; behold, he has triumphed over us and set his foot upon us and depicted the image of God. All we, like sheep, have gone astray ; we have turned every one to his own way ; we were as sheep going astray, but now we have returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, and we are enfolded within the fold of Christ. We give ourselves to Thee in a new covenant ; we pray Thee for the gift, the daily gift, of a new heart, a new and more sensitive conscience, a new and quicker imagination, that we may here and everywhere see the beauty and the presence and the meaning of God. Be with us all the days of this year, we humbly entreat Thee in the name of Christ. Shew us Thy lovingkindness and Thy tender mercy in a new vision morning by morning, and at night-time shew us some bright star we have never seen before. Guide the perplexed, comfort and heal the sick, minister to the necessities, especially the soul-necessities, of the poorest of the poor of Thy creatures, and give us all to feel that we are still and evermore under the sunshine of Thy love, Thou Maker of Calvary, Thou Redeemer of souls. Amen.

I.

THE DIVINE POET.

"Behold, I make all things new."—REV. xxi. 5.



ALTHOUGH this is but the fifth verse of the chapter, the chapter seems to be already full of newness, full of hope, full of promise. We have in English only one word "new" ; in the language of the New Testament there are two words to express newness. Sometimes the words strongly contrast each other, sometimes they fall into each other, and sometimes they intensify each other. Sometimes the word new means a continuation, development, purification, completion of that which has already been in existence ; the expansion is new, or the application is new, but the thing itself is a root that goes back right into the very garden of God. The new man differs from

the old man, not in the sense that the old man has been utterly abolished or destroyed, but that the new man has been made new, renewed, turned back, so to say, into the original purpose of God, and clothed with the vesture of a larger and purer individuality. There has been a gate in this wall for many a year; it has fallen more or less into dilapidation; the owner of the wall has renewed the gate: that is one sense in which the word new is employed. There never was a gate in this wall, but the owner of the wall has determined to insert one; it will be opened to the public to-morrow: that is another sense in which the word new is employed in Holy Scripture.

This chapter, I repeat, is already full of the word and the wine and the music new: "A new heaven and a new earth"; the "new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven"; "behold, I make all things new." And not before the time. The world is weary of its wickedness and groaning and restlessness; we have had tears enough and death enough and sorrow and crying and pain ineffable: great God, awake and make all things new! This is the promise of these opening verses: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And He that sat upon the throne said"—and said by right—"Behold, I make all things new," and the past shall be forgotten like a dream without memory. Enough! These are grand words; they thrill us by their power, we are caught up into somewhat of their stature and majesty. The New Testament is bound to bring us new things by its very name; it is a new testament: there was a testament before it. This is the real newness—the continuation and the completion of something which has gone before. This is not a first writing, it is a second writing, and new, not in its God, not in its redeeming purpose, but new in many an application, new in many a realisation by the soul of the higher life and the grander possibility. Your memory will instantly supply numerous instances in which this young word new, yet this old word in all its best

meanings, occurs in the New Testament—new creature, new man, new name, new song.

We are standing together in prayer and in communion on the first day of the last year in the nineteenth century; we want a message; we have felt the monotony of time; its endless and burdensome repetitions have often become a weariness and a mystery to us; it has seemed as if God Himself had been exhausted, and no novelty were possible to the Divine genius. God rebukes us from His throne this day, saying in clear thunder-tones, "Behold, I make all things new:" I give them a new meaning, a new lease, a new application, a new music, a new expressiveness. Let us, then, think of that larger newness; let us think of the new morning, with all its poetry of dawn and dew and freshness of power.

Note the personality of the text. The Speaker is alive; the Speaker is individualised from all other speakers; the Speaker is appalling in His awesome solitude. He would seem to have no companion now; yea, rather, it would seem as if the threefold Personality had become united in one name. No more we hear of "Let us make," we are now confronted by an intenser term, "Behold, I make all things new." It would seem as if each Person in the Divine Trinity had times of special expression and times of special relation to nature and to man and to providence and to destiny: now it is the Father; and the other Persons of the Trinity are concealed, as it were, behind His glory: now it is the Son, the only begotten Son, the Saviour of the world: and, finally, it is the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, who rules the whole mystery of human development. And what if now the Three should in a peculiar and definite sense be One—as if the Three-One should all be speaking in, "Behold, I make all things new."

Has the word "make" any special significance in this passage? Certainly; it is the keyword. God represents Himself as the maker, the poet; for in the deepest classical sense the poet is the maker.

not the statistician, not the geometer, not the man who deals in magnitudes and quantities and numbers and ever-changing relations of an arithmetical or superficial kind: these men are not makers; the poets "make"—God is the Poet. He makes, He makes all things, He makes all things new. God is the fountain of wealth, God is the author of precious stones, God is the maker of harvest-fields and vineyards; God pours out the sea, God causes the stars to spill their glory on the meaner worlds. Associate the idea of the poet with the term worker or maker. God is the beginner of all things: all things are in God; there is not a pebble on all the sea-shore that He did not let fall there—a diamond in His eyes, mere sand in ours, for vulgarity debases whatever it looks on. God is the unceasing poet, the unceasing maker. He never makes a June that lasts longer than a month, but He makes millions of Junes, millions of springs, millions of autumn days, with their brown and gold and play and flash of exquisite beauty. He makes them as a lapidary might make the stone shapely; He makes them as the poet might startle the common wind into music. See the Poet Divine in every summer day, in every sparklet of dew, in every dawn, in every babe, in every morning promise.

The great temptation is to forget the maker of so much. If He had made less He would have had greater fame with some of us. He has so richly starred the heavens with planetary fire and stellar expressiveness that we seldom look upon them, for we think we should find our fortune in the dust. If the author had written fewer books the books he has written would have been more appreciated. Sometimes an author finds his severest competitor in himself. Occasionally it is given to a man to speak his very best in his first speech. He cannot grow; we meet him again in a quarter of a century, and we find him almost less than he was a quarter of a century before. Other men do their worst at first, and they have their education in the public eye, their blunders are public property, and men quote those blunders against them, and say, Remember what mistakes he made, into what errors he

fell, how crude were his first efforts. But the giant of the morning grows, the years are not wasted upon him, there is in him somewhat of the Divine making power, and he grows to youth, and not towards senility.

If God is the poet or maker, for the terms are identical, what wonder if His works are to be poetically and ideally interpreted? We may have missed the key at this very point. Forgetting that God is a poet, we have endeavoured to give a prose rendering of His poetry. What an anticlimax is that! what a mischief in criticism! We have sent the blind man to criticise the parable of colour, we have asked the deaf man to tell us what Beethoven meant when he was lost in the upper heavens of reverie and awestruck contemplation. Be very careful how you trust the prose man out of your sight! He will bring you a poor report of any Canaan to which you may send him. You should send poets ahead, and not prosaic and therefore false interpreters: the poets will bring back the grapes and make the grapes the bigger as they look at them and hold them up to observation and approval. The prose man has some sort of little superficial errand to complete in this world. Fit him with a hammer and a bag and a staff, and let him spend an innocent day as a stone-breaker of the higher grade—a man who will chip off little noses of rock and peer into strata of sands, but that man will never interpret the universe to you. He has no universe, he has only a backyard, an enclosed paved ground. The geologist, if he be nothing but a geologist, will come back at eventide nearly as empty-handed, and certainly as empty-hearted, as when he went out in the morning. So with the Divine Scriptures. The literary geologist can never interpret the Bible. The literary inquirer would have dug up the bush in the wilderness and have torn it to pieces to see where the light came from. We want the higher translation. There is a transliteration that is a commerce of words, particles, moods and tenses, of conjugated syntax—poor eating! poor bone-picking!—my soul loatheth this light bread! There are those who are afraid of reading meanings into the text; I am more afraid of the men who read meanings out of the text. The text is full of meaning.

Whatever the text is it can be so treated by the Spirit of God through the ministry of man that the fruit of it shall shake like Lebanon. Beware of making little Bibles. The Book of God begins, but never ends. Saith He, when we have finished His revelation so far as the letter is concerned, "Behold, I make all things new." Back to Moses, and on to the Apocalypse, and you will find that the road is the newer because you have once trodden it.

Only the poet can read the cloud to me and the omen and the parable; for my poor life is surrounded by apocalyptic image and suggestion and half-disclosed dream and muttering parable, and I say, Lives there here no prophet who can interpret these things to me? shall the dream drop into a nightmare because there is no Daniel to unravel it? Only poets, minor poets, makers after the Divine image, can enter into the holiest chambers and sanctuaries of the universe. The poor literalist makes nothing; he lives upon the remembrance of other men. He is not a theologian, he is a theological caretaker, living in the lowest basement of the house, and looking at the blue of the morning through the area railings. He a theologian! A theologian, not of the literary, library-made type, but of the Divine meaning, reads the cloud, the morning, the opal, the ruby; reads the blue garniture and garmenting of the invisible Poet, and is amazed and lost in grateful wonder as He speaks Himself in the crimson which is in reality redeeming blood.

Note that the proclamation by the very necessity of its terms is full of hope. "Behold, I make all things new." In the Divine economy things seem linked together in festoons and masses and unities. When one thing is made new all things seem to be made new. It is even so with sin, with bad character, with evil example. A man cannot sin in his own house without the dog being the worse for it; a man cannot sin, and keep the sunshine on his vineyard; a man cannot sin, and laugh. He gurgles and cachinnates and makes a throat-noise, but his soul is not in the high delight and festival of joy. When God makes one thing new He makes all things new in a sense we can readily understand on a small scale. "God has made

a violet." Never! "I have seen it." Quite right; but because He made that violet He has made a million violets, and because He has made the violets He has made the primroses and the buttercups and all the wild flowers and all the other flowers up to the highest expression of floral gaiety: they go together. When the morning comes the morning awakens the whole sky.

Christianity is the religion of hope, the religion of renewal, the religion of development. It has never uttered its final word; it begins its eloquence, it never finishes it in any sense that means finality or the exhaustion of God. "Behold, I make all things new." There is no old age in Christianity; time writes no wrinkle on its brow; nothing can stale its infinite variety. It is because it is not truly interpreted and fervently preached as with lips of fire that the Gospel seems to have lost its power: there is no failure of energy with God. "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of His understanding." "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: He calleth them all by names by the greatness of His might, for that He is strong in power; not one faileth." To preserve is to create. There is no finality of purpose in God. The sun sets—in a very limited degree. If I could hear two speakers on this question of the setting sun they would contradict one another. One speaker says the sun is setting; the other speaker says the sun is rising. Both the statements are correct; you must have regard to the standing point of each speaker. The setting sun is the rising sun, the rising sun is the setting sun. The sun never wearies, but dips into one ocean that he may irradiate and bless the shore of another sea. If we associated with Christ we should live at the very gate of the morning. There is no decay in the Christian heart. To die is gain. We grow towards the better youth. Life and immortality have been brought to light in the Gospel. Do not suppose that the Bible is a finished book. We need no new Bible until we have thoroughly read the old one.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we have nothing to give Thee but our love. Thou dost call for our love in the first and great commandment of the law. We offer Thee our love whilst we gather around the Cross. We love God because He first loved us : God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life : herein is love ; while we were yet sinners Christ died for us, that He might lay His hand upon God and upon the sinner and make reconciliation. We stand in the glory of this infinite love and sing our morning hymn and make our morning obeisance at the throne. We have come from many houses into one house ; this is none other than the house of God. In our Father's house there is bread enough and to spare ; there is a fountain of refreshment, there is a great light of the sun sevenfold, there is a promise of pardon to penitence, and there is an offer of grace to all the manifold necessity of human experience. We will rejoice and be glad in His house, we will make its walls wide as the horizon and its roof high as the places of the stars, and our hearts shall shout for very joy, and our life shall be one tumult of gladness. We will speak of Thy great goodness, we will say with all the great houses of history, His mercy endureth for ever. If we have halted for a moment, being unwilling to say so because of immediate trouble and because of overwhelming anxiety, Thou hast given us time, Thou hast called the anthem to halt until Thou hast enabled us to unite our voices with its solemn thunder. So now we can say, His mercy endureth for ever. We would speak of our sin, but that Thou dost put Thine hand upon our mouth and stifle the voice of our penitence ; we hardly have time to say, Lord, we have sinned against Thee, until Thou dost call for the best robe, and the ring of gold, and the fatted calf for the household feast. Whilst we are thus stopped in our penitence because of Thy great love, we still think of our sin and mourn it, and cast it away from us as a thing to be loathed for ever. Where sin abounds grace doth much more abound. We would enjoy the victory of our faith ; it shall be no longer to us an intellectual feat and exercise, but a great and glorious victory which shall enable us to say that sin is vanquished, that death is dead. We come again to renew all that is best and holiest in the vows which make our manhood strong ; enable

us again to wed the truth and to kiss the bride of purity, and to walk forth with the garments of beauty, and to join the procession of the ages. Save us from self-contempt, and that self-degradation which has no hope; take us out of the pit of despair, lest we die as if poisoned by darkness, and light Thine own truth in our hearts, and give us a shining of Thy glory in our life. Thou knowest us altogether, not one is omitted from Thy counting; the old man, the little child, the mother, and the nurse, and the sick one, and the physician, the dying and those who watch the awful process; and Thou canst comfort us out of the infinite resources of Thy grace. The Lord give us to feel that the Cross is all merciful, all pitiful, all redemptive, and may we look away from our hated selves, and fix our vision and our expectancy upon the Cross of Christ. Amen.

II.

THE KNOWN AND THE UNKNOWN.

"There is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen."—JOB xxviii. 7.



THE Divine Speaker knows what He is talking about. We have just read in the fiftieth psalm, "I know all the fowls of the mountains"—I made their wings, I kindled the fire of their eyes, I know their power of sight and of flight: there is a way which no fowl knoweth and there is a path which the vulture's eye hath not seen. Let us insert a word that will give emphasis to the expression: There is a path which even the vulture's eye hath not seen: the greatest eye, the eye that looks from horizon to horizon as if it were but a handbreadth in space; the eye that drinks in the morning and dares the noon-day: even that eye has not seen all the paths which radiate from the throne of God.

It is something in our highest education to know the limitations within which we live. It is something to know that there is something we cannot know. The marvellous and frivolous conundrum which earns a scanty constituency and livelihood under the name

of agnosticism looks upon itself in a mirror of its own silvering, and admires its own features, and describes itself as an originality—the stalest old witch that ever history has burned. The Bible is the great book of limitations. The Bible tells us what trees we may eat of and what trees we must leave untouched. The Bible indicates what entrances we may use as we go out of the garden and into the garden, and there are entrances or doors that are not marked private because there is no need to mark that private which no eye can see: to mark it private would be to call attention to it and to mock that attention by an impossibility if not a threatening. I am not at all discouraged in the culture of my faith because some man does not know what is on the other side of the wall; he does not make an unbeliever of me; my altar is not in his keeping, he did not give me the life of my soul and he shall not trifle with it. Our great environment—to use a word swollen with unholy pride—is ignorance. We have a little green spot to stand upon which we call by the name of intelligence or literature or genius or intellect, but beyond, what is there but uncouth and unmeasured miles of ignorance unexplored and at present unexplorable? Suppose a man were asked at night what is the environment of life? The man would answer, and answer truly and modestly, and religiously in a certain sense: “The environment of life is very small, I do not know whether the word environment is not too great a word to apply to my surrounding; I can see next to nothing, life is environed by shadows, there is hardly any illumination, I can clearly measure the geometry within which life throbs, rises, falls; I do hardly know at times which is cradle and which is grave: to talk about environment is to bring a great word to bear upon a very small subject.” I like the man’s voice, there is a minor tone of despair about it suggestive of melancholy and self-helplessness and maimed and suffocated ambition. Suppose the same man were asked at midday what is the environment of life; he would answer, “Glory, light, height, music, opportunity, possibility, the immeasurable!” That is not the answer you gave me a few weeks ago. “No, you asked me at midnight, to-day you ask me at noontide; I am the same man, it is the same uni-

verse and the same environment; I did not see it once, I see it now; both my statements are the statements of honesty." Quite right: but never mistake midnight for midday; always reserve on the matter of possibility and changing time and mutable circumstances. Why, the environment of night is not always the same; there are some nights so long, so dark, so silently silent; there are other nights that have their stars and their night songs and their dreams and their shadowed poems; night is not always darksome. Be very careful, therefore, how you define environment and limitation, and always remember that you see next to nothing, and that there is a way which no fowl knoweth and a path which the vulture's eye hath not seen, though it dares the morning to outdazzle its vision.

Until we know all we should not pass judgment upon all. That would seem to be a sensible proposition; it would apply to physics and to commerce and to daily experience and to religion. If we would carry up some of our maxims from the market-place into the Church, we should often be surprised at the clear, sound rationalism, or best reason, of the Christian faith. If you heard in the market-place a man chattering about a subject concerning which he knew nothing, I do not believe it would disturb your commercial equanimity; you might appear to listen without hearing, and you might inwardly comment upon the knave's folly. Why do you smile at this man? is he not fluent? "He is very fluent." Does he not talk as if he knew something about the subject? "In very deed he talks as if he knew everything about all subjects." Then why do you not bend the knee before him and accept the law at his lips? "Because we know that upon this particular commercial subject he has no information, no insight whatsoever." That is all I ask you to do in relation to men who are omniscient enough to know what Omniscience ought to have done if it had been as omniscient as itself is omniscient. Is it not common sense that a man should not speak upon all until he knows all? and is it not in harmony with the best logic that a man should not make his conclusions larger than his premisses? and is it not true architecture and philosophical geometry

that a man should not set a pyramid upon its apex? John Foster used to say no man is at liberty to declare that there is no God until he has been everywhere, because if there is one place where he has not been that may be the place in which God resides. A man must be God to deny God. It is not within our limited lips to throw a contradiction wide enough for the subject upon the infinite proposition that God is. If you are going to blow down the universe, do take a gun or some other engine big enough for the purpose, and kindly relieve your little chattering mouth from the infinite and impossible task of trying to blow the universe to pieces through your poor breath. There is a way which the fowl doth not know, there is a path which even the vulture's eye hath not seen; along that road and along that path when you are permitted to enter you may discover the sanctuary of God, the shekinah that lights the mornings of the universe. It is always distressing, if it were worth being distressed about, that ignorance should pronounce universal and final judgments.

One of the first conditions of true knowledge is to know that knowledge is limited. You begin your education most fruitfully and satisfactorily when you lay it down as a certainty that for the present some things are inaccessible and unknowable. "That saves me a great deal of time." Certainly! "You save me from a great many needless journeys by assuring me that all the ways of the universe are not thoroughfares." Certainly. I put more than seven days into your week by telling you that it is useless to do certain things or make certain attempts; now concentrate, fix your undivided attention upon that which is possible. Religion is the best economist of time. True piety is the least wasteful of all mental exercises: it knows what it can do, what it may do, what it ought to do, what it cannot do, what it is not expected to do. If I found a man who was trying to make eight days of a week, and I could persuade that man that it is impossible to make an eighth day according to the present arrangement of time and the succession of events, I would save that man from immense trouble, and enable him to concentrate his attention upon the seven days which do appeal to him

for conscientious industry. It is a real saving of time to be told that it is no use knocking at this door or knocking at that door or trying to find a bell-rope where there is none, or to drive away a man from a dream of nothingness that he may take up the service of utility. That is what the Christian religion does for man; it says to him quite plainly, There are gates that God has not opened yet, He may open them, He alone can open them, the time of opening them is in His decision; in the meantime, what you have to do is to shoulder your burden, carry your cross, erect yourself into the full stature of your moral manhood, and wait as only courage can wait, and suffer as only fortitude can endure.

The very keenest sight known to men requires assistance. That may be a very humbling confession, but it is in strict harmony with fact. Even the vulture's eye hath not seen every path, and even the human eye has not seen everything which it is supposed to have seen. Sometimes that wondrous organism, the human eye, has to buy itself a little piece of glass in order to see how to write a letter to a child. Sometimes the lapidary says, "I cannot tell you what this diamond is in quality until I get down to my place of business where my lenses are." Can you not see the depth of the diamond without the lens? "I cannot." It is something to know that. What, is it possible that a man should need a glass to enable him to see whether there is a speck inside a diamond? Yes, it is possible. "This diamond looks of the first water, but I cannot fully judge it yet; when I get the proper instrument and look at it, I will tell you in a moment exactly the value of your diamond, not until then." Is it true that there may be on one little green leaf a living population larger than the population of Europe? "Absolute nonsense!" Why do you say so? "Why, look at the leaf; here is the leaf, my eyes are open, I am looking at the leaf, there is not a little life upon it; I may describe the leaf as absolutely lifeless; why, I have eyes, I can see, I can see the leaf, I must believe my own eyes." What blatant nonsense! The one thing you cannot believe is the testimony of your eyes. Seeing is believing. Yes, but what is seeing? You

have left the chief term in the proposition undefined. No man sees. Will you be good enough now to put that same leaf under this microscope and adjust the microscope so as to bring its full power to bear upon the leaf; now, look through that microscope, and report to me about the same leaf; I have taken down your first testimony, I never saw a man more strenuously emphatic in my life, I have noted all the words you used, and the accent of your delivery I shall never forget; now, report upon the same leaf. "A countless host, a busy host, what thoroughfares, what cities, what a commerce is going on, what activity, what falling over one another, what rising, sinking, moving, heaving!" I thought you were the man who could see! "Excuse me! your reproach will be intolerable if you press it, I was a fool, I see now." You don't! "What makes you say so?" If I could find a microscope of tenfold the power of the one that is now used, you would see what is now unseeable. From this time forth, sir, will you be silent? "I will, so help me God!" Now you begin to be religious.

The mystery of what you call nature is spiritual. There is a wonderful thing which you call nature, and which you have no right to call nature, and which is a definition without authority, and which is void by generality, and which is turned to impudence upon your lips. What is nature? Can any dictionary handle the word? can any lexicon give you an equivalent in terms? Impossible! "What we call external nature—" External to what? external to whom? and how do you know that you are not yourself part of that externalism? and who gave you any right to say that it is external? "But how do you show that what we call nature, a term we may use temporarily and for the sake of convenience, is spiritual?" The answer is evident. Is nature orderly? Yes. What is order? No man can define order; he can only define a section or part of order; if you could see a little further his order might be turned into disorder, and the disorder might be part of a higher law than his mind has yet grasped; and there may be an eccentricity of order, and some of the planets may be cutting capers and do not fall easily within the lines of our so-called order. They say that there are eccentric

motions in the dance of the planets or the moving of the stars. How does nature keep together? Do you maintain it? No. How does continuity preserve itself? It is renewed. What is renewal? and what is the force that can renew without being part of the very force that renews or is renewed? What, is there a great oiling Personality of the universe going round feeding the machines with oil according as its friction exhausts itself in the infinite speed of the unmeasured and inconceivable revolutions? What is the exact meaning of the word renewed as it is often found in Scripture? It is the most poetical definition you can imagine. "Shall renew their strength": shall make themselves young again. There is no old age in faith; it is atheism that withers and becomes senile and that crawls to a pit called the grave. Faith gets younger as the millenniums come and go. Nature has its own soul just as the body has its own spirit. There is a soul of order, a soul of renewal, a soul of distribution, a soul of spheral music. You do not know nature simply because you know certain parts of her. You see her spring and summer, autumn and winter; you see something of the irregularities of the formation of the earth's surface; you have glasses which you will throw away one day because they are not big enough to see what you are looking at; you may throw away your telescope and get a larger, and your microscope and get a better, and do away with all your lenses, and wonder how the men of ten thousand years ago ever put up with such poor, mean instruments. Do you know the householder because you know the house? Do you know a certain house at the junction of the roads as you walk along towards the destination you have in view? Perfectly well. Then of course you know all the people who live in it? No, I never spoke to any of them. Would you know any of them if you saw them on the street? I would not. But you know the house? Perfectly well. That is very much what men do with sweet old Mother Nature. They know something of the masonry and the fortification, and the walling and the ditching, and the gardening within which she lives, but the old dame herself that feeds her strength from the very breast of God they cannot see: she never looks out of her own windows; she is the darling of God. Does the letter-carrier read the

letters which he delivers? He may read an occasional postcard. That is exactly what you do; and yet you think you know all the correspondence of God. No, there is a way which no fowl knoweth, a path which the vulture's eye hath not seen. God entrusts you with the envelope, not with the letter. Your business is limited; you may deliver the letter or preserve it for future reading, but for the time being reading would be impossible, and if possible would be a trespass.

To know is the blessing. Not the quantity we know, but the fact that we can know—that is the distinguishing attribute of man. To know is better than knowledge; the power of knowledge is greater than the acquisition that is secured. The soul is greater than any education it can receive. A man-child is born into the world—why make so much ado about it? Let the thing grow ten or twenty years, and then we will see what value it has. The value is in the man-child born; any acquisition he may make is nothing compared to himself. That seems to give me a new conception of things. The conception may be new, but it is right and fundamental, and essential to a true appreciation of things. The magistrate even does not take care of the child because it can do the first four rules of arithmetic, and even that marvellous, most marvellous of all human compositions, called a jury, does not acquit the prisoner because he knows trigonometry and can be trusted in the intricacies of fluxions, and a man is not driven away because he does not know how to spell his name. The coroner would be bound to sit under certain circumstances upon persons who when living could not spell. But we thought education was the great thing? Nothing of the sort; it is the man that is great, not the education; the soul, not the certificate of certain acquirements. The certificate may come to be of good social value, but the man is the quantity to be appreciated. And so the power to know is the distinguishing characteristic and attribute of man.

The application is immediate and practical. The text is the answer to intellectual ambition. There is a point to stop at; there is a place to sit down because

to attempt to advance would be to attempt an impossibility. The text is, secondly, an encouragement to beginners in spiritual inquiry. They may say to themselves, We are not expected to know everything; we are privileged to know a little, we can make certain advance and progress in the Divine Kingdom, but we are severely limited, and beyond our limitation we have no responsibility. And, thirdly, the text imposes no limit of moral excellence. Where is there a text that says you are good enough, stand still? There are texts that say, Don't be wise beyond a given point, stop within a limited sanctuary, clearly understand that it is not within the finite capacity of man to understand the infinite purpose and designs of God. Produce a text which says, You have acquired enough goodness, you are fit for the judgment of God, you need not add another virtue or another grace or another excellence. There is no such text. There is a text which says, "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." When we have obeyed that text fully, we may ask for another.

PRAYER.

ALmighty GOD, we are of yesterday and know nothing. Our days are passed away as if in Thy wrath, they are as a smoke perishing in the air. Oh that we could link ourselves on to the eternal movement! Oh that we could abide in the years that are at Thy right hand! Oh that we were citizens of the city eternal, where the days cannot be counted and where there are no nights to number! We would live in the eternal Presence, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, inspired by great conceptions of our own personality and destiny in Jesus Christ the Lord. We would no longer look at the little and the perishing and the contemptible, but at the great and the immortal and the majestic; we would live and move and have our being in God; then we shall know all things as we ought to know them, day by day we shall have light upon light, and every spring and every summer shall bring us more flowers and more fruit from the garden of God. We give ourselves into Thy mighty, tender keeping; they are well kept who are kept by the right hand of God: hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe, is the cry of every self-distrustful heart. And this we say word by word and hope by hope in the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour; our altar is the Cross, our sanctuary is Calvary, and our hope is in the sacrifice which the Priest Himself offered. If we could live in these truths and magnify them and give them daily application to this ever-changing life, how strong we should be and restful, and how victorious over the whole world of enmity. Let the Lord hear us, and His listening shall be to us as a gracious answer! Amen.

III.

THE TWO AGNOSTICISMS.

"Ye know not what shall be on the morrow."—JAMES iv. 14.



AND yet it is so near! It is apparently almost visible, and yet it is in reality as invisible as God. There is a grotesque variety of intellectual modesty known by the name of Agnosticism. It says that there are some things not only not known, but there are some things which are also not knowable; that is to say, it is impossible to know them. There are things which Agnosticism cannot conceive, and therefore—swift reasoning!—no one can possibly know them. I am not only struck by the supreme and overpowering modesty of this assertion. I am equally struck by the abjectly intellectual meanness of the whole notion of unknowableness as applied to what we believe to be the personality and the sanctuary of God.

But let us admit for a moment—the moment cannot be too short—that there are some things which are not known and not knowable, there are some things not yet conceived and apparently inconceivable by the mind of man. That may be so, but that is no reason for our believing that even these things can be degraded to such a level that our own contempt can scrape its feet upon them. Not knowable does not necessarily authorise any man to degrade the not-knowable into that which is contemptible, and into that which is worthless. There is a not-knowableness that should lift up the whole character, investing it with reverence, making the noisy tongue silent in presence of certain mysteries, movements, and inexplicabilities; there is a not-knowableness that should make men almost religious. Always, therefore, distinguish between the one agnosticism and the other. There is no book so agnostic as the Bible. Herein the Bible has been treated with great injustice. One would suppose that it is quite a nineteenth-century invention or discovery, is this marvellous but fluent and dogmatic agnosticism; as to its fluency and its dogmatism it may be quite a young thing, but as to the innermost soul and pith of it,

in the degree in which it represents the unknowableness of God it is trading upon the very Bible which it affects to despise. "We are of yesterday and know nothing; who can find out the Almighty unto perfection? God is great, and we know Him not; there is no searching of His understanding; no man hath seen God at any time." These are the great principles of the Christian conception and the Christian philosophy, and we cannot silently allow men to appropriate these and use them as if themselves had discovered them. All that not-know philosophy is in the Bible. That is my foothold and that is my security as a religious teacher. It amounts almost to a challenge to produce contrary evidence; the court is open, the market-place is unroofed, the wind carries the challenge in all directions, and I would send it forth in ever-reduplicating thunder to produce anything anywhere at any time that is sound, true, beneficent, musical, divine that is not to be found in plasm and in suggestion in the book which we receive as the Word of God.

Here is a very marvellous simplicity of expression, and yet a proud philosophy of life. Certain men are boasting of what they are going to do to-morrow, and they speak of the to-morrow of years, not only of the to-morrow of days. They say, "We shall tarry here or there a year"; yea, they are prepared to alter the unit and say, We shall remain here or there a decade, a ten-years period, and we shall work commercial wonders. Whereupon a whispering but penetrating voice says to them, and they can hear it through all their fluent noise, "Ye know not what shall be on the morrow . . . ye ought to say, If the Lord will"; you ought to be religious even in the distribution and appropriation of your time. There is a secularism that is pious, and there is a piety that covers the whole secular need and distributes all the economies of life as if they were trusts and stewardships.

Here, then, is an instance of real agnosticism. We find that instance in the period of time which we glibly talk of as to-morrow. No man has seen to-morrow, no man can see to-morrow, to-morrow is not within the visual line, and is not within the line of calculation unless the line be approached religiously.

We have no right to speak about to-morrow as if we had any lien upon it or any right to its possession and enjoyment. We can only enter the sanctuary called to-morrow by the gate Beautiful, the gate of God's temple, the portal of the sanctuary of the Eternal. When we speak of to-morrow we should speak in an undertone; when we speak of the coming time we should whisper to ourselves lest we disturb some avenging ghost who is jealous of being spoken about without the customary and established sanctions. This is to change the whole range and tenour of conversation. We have to be religious even in making appointments. The Spirit of the book says, Stop! are you talking about to-morrow, and are you talking about to-morrow as if you had a right to it and some promise of its enjoyment? Stop! ye ought to say, If the Lord will. Into this sanctuary of the invisible Presence you can only proceed through this gate of If, this gate of contingency, this gate of the Divine will; before you speak about to-morrow, speak of it to God, and get His permission to make any appointment for to-morrow noon or for to-morrow eventide.

Let us personalise the morrow; let us no longer think of it as some mere grade or shadow of time, let us rather regard it as a personality, a presence, looking at us though we cannot look at it; and the contention of the religious thinker is that to-morrow is in its own way and degree as great a mystery as God. That is the reflection which rebukes me when I want to settle down upon the swamp which by a falsification of realities I call the rock of agnosticism. I do not know God, I cannot know God, I have not seen God, God is not knowable; I do not deny that there is a God, but if there is a God I cannot comprehend or conceive Him. You can employ exactly the same words in regard to the period of time called to-morrow, and I want to bring you into close quarters with that fact. I will take you away from the metaphysical and the supposedly distant and transcendental, and I will shut you up with your own days; you have to-day and yesterday and to-morrow, I will bring you into the court and ask you, Have you seen to-morrow? do you know what shall be on the morrow? are you sure there will be a to-morrow? are you sure you will live

to see it? Let us no longer have the drivel talk about not being able to know God even if there is a God until we are prepared to apply our own foolish reasoning to the spirit, the spectre, called to-morrow, unseen, invisible. It may come—so may God!

If I were to attempt to plunge you into some abstract and some occult reasoning, metaphysical and transcendental, about the personality and providence and sovereignty of God, you could avoid me by saying that really you had not either capacity or time to understand these remarkably subtle and remote distinctions. But I do not take that course; I speak to you as a man having a nature common with my own, and I say that if you reject God or any phase of God for the reason or the pretence which you have alleged you must reject to-morrow, and with your loss of God you lose your own time, your own weeks, your own coming mornings. He loses much who loses God; he loses interest in music, in art, in love, in all the deeper and finer charities of life. A man cannot live without God and remain rich in any direction, except there be wealth in emptiness, except there be opulence in voidness and ignorance. It would be a delightful release to the so-called agnostic if we could permit him to speak about nothing but God; upon that great subject he easily bewilders himself, and when the subject is pressed upon him he says, I do not deny that there is a God; I say that if there is a God He does not come within human comprehension or apprehension, and He is so remote from all that is experimental and all that is known that I simply leave the question. You cannot! You cannot leave the sun, you cannot leave the fresh air, and do without them or be independent of them; there are certain universals which belong to the sovereign and to the peasant, to the philosopher and to the fool, to all breathing living things, and you cannot turn your back when you please, and play the fool at your own will and sweet fancy, and still be regarded as a respectable and honourable citizen.

If I reject God upon the grounds which have been indicated I shall also reject the next harvest that is supposed to be coming. I want to show by these simple illustrations how vast an area is covered by the not-knowing and the supposed not-knowableness of

God. Has any man seen next harvest? can any man tell me definitely what next harvest will be? does any man know that there will be a next harvest? is any man prepared to make oath and say that by next harvest-time as it is usually cultivated the world will not be burned up and have passed away like a hot smoke? Inasmuch as no man can definitely say that he has seen next harvest, or that next harvest will positively and certainly come; inasmuch as no man can see it until it has come, what do you say if we neglect the idea altogether? what do you say if we abandon the goddess and leave Ceres with her garland of wheat, and say we shall have nothing more to do with her throne or her sceptre? for next harvest has never been seen, has never come within the experience of any living creature known to us, and therefore must be regarded as incognoscible and inconceivable. If I were to allow this fluent chatterer who is talking about the inconceivable to talk only about God he might almost, at least in his own fancy, add one cubit unto his stature, so majestic and statue-like may men be in religious ignorance; but when I bind him down to the morrow and to next harvest, and tell him that all his reasoning applies to these things, he cannot go back upon yesterday. Yesterday has not pledged to-morrow; ten million harvests have not pledged the next harvest, and even if it were bound by a written and sealed oath, so far as men are concerned nobody can say that by some operation of so-called nature the whole world may not be blown away in white ashes, so that there shall be neither husbandman nor farmer, neither sower of seed nor swinger of scythe and sickle.

What applies to to-morrow and to the harvest applies to your own little child. Will it be twenty-one in a given number of years? How do you know that the child will live those years? The child may be dead when you go home to-night. Have you seen the babe as a young man? No. How do you know that he will ever be a young man? What will his character be? May he one day curse the father that begot him and the mother that gave him suck? Can you foresee the child's destiny and doom? Can you conceive it along certain lines? No. Then take care how you

use that blunt instrument of so-called inconceivableness, because if it can knock down God it can knock down all the little gods, toys of your own house and your own market-place; it is a tremendous instrument, and must be cautiously used. No man can tear the Bible to pieces and leave the poets in their integrity; no man can tear down Moses and the prophets and the minstrels and leave the canvas of the artists unscratched and uninjured. When God goes He takes the universe with Him.

Do you know the hour of death? No. Then there is no hour of death because you do not know it. Can you conceive the circumstances under which you will die? No. Then there are no circumstances surrounding your death. Because certain things are not knowable at this moment, it does not follow that they will not be knowable in an hour, and the hour that has to come is as mysterious as the God out of whose eternity it fell. We are bounded by very stiff and stern lines. Verily it is true that our breath is in our nostrils; it is solemnly true that we know not what an hour or a day may bring forth, or what may happen in the darkness of the nighttime that is due in a few hours. Let us be careful how we blatantly and bluntly reason about the verities of things, for to-day has a ghost, to-morrow is a white invisible spectre, and all that is coming has no name, and can neither be baptised nor named until it has appeared at appeal.

Even suppose that we do not know to-morrow, it is unwise to exclude it from our thought. Even suppose that we do not know God, and cannot know God unto perfection, we are not therefore made wise by extruding Him from the temple of our thought. The not-knowable may be the true wisdom, and we are not able to know what we do know until we properly appreciate the not-knowable. No man can build a wall who is ignorant practically, if not scientifically and theoretically, of the geometry of creation. Every little thing we know owes its quality to the things it belongs to. Knowledge is not a little detached atom here and there, a broken syllable; it is part and parcel of a great vision, a great music, a great unity, and we only know the part as it ought to be known in the degree in which we read it in the spirit of the con-

solidated totality of things. Why does this student want to know seven languages or twelve? Can he not find scope enough in his mother tongue without resorting to all these hard words and difficult terms? He cannot; no man can truly know any language until he knows in some degree all the languages it came out of. Do you suppose that the English language is as insular as the English mind? Do you suppose that the English language is just as little as an Englishman? Why, the English language is nearly all civilised languages in one: where its roots go to who can tell? And no man can speak the English language in all its ramification and expressiveness until he has some knowledge at least of the main fountains out of which it flowed; then he speaks with mastery, with the mastery of words, with the confidence of acquaintanceship and knowledge. To know any one language thoroughly, it may be possible that we may have to know a dozen other languages that apparently have no relation to it. Never forget the atmosphere of knowledge, and never forget that literature is not an alphabet but an exposition, an intellectual declaration and revelation, as the case may be.

So with regard to this idea of to-morrow, and next harvest, and a little child, and the day of death, and all the other futurities: we may know them in their spirit without knowing them in their detail. We know God by revelation. I could certainly not deny to God the power of revealing Himself; I should then be making myself a kind of God if I declared that Omniscience is limited and that Omnipotence is not almighty. Who am I that I should undertake to distribute the meanings of these terms, and fix them arbitrarily and apply them just as I will? I believe that God has revealed Himself to the mind and heart of man; I do not believe that man has found out God, but I believe that God has found out man. I do not believe that any man can find out God intellectually as He is known to the Christian sentiment, but I believe that God reveals Himself to the intellect until it becomes a warm heart, and until both mind and heart say, "Behold, God is here, and the universe is His temple." Nothing could be easier as a merely physical exercise than to take away revelation and to say, "You shall never have

what you term the holy Bible ; " but we have had it, and we have laid it up where moth and rust do not corrupt, and where thieves cannot break through and steal. It has affected our sentiment, it has changed our disposition, it has given us a really true outlook upon life and upon all things, and it cannot wither, the priest cannot shut it up, and the tyrant cannot burn it ; once in the world, it can never be got out of it.

We believe that God is known by incarnation, we believe that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us ; we believe that the Word was in the beginning, and was with God, and was God, and that it was infleshed, embodied, and shown to the eyes and to the whole perception of human reason and human consciousness. That is the Christian idea, and we hold it so that we cannot easily change it. If we held this doctrine as a mere guess, as the possible solution of a conundrum or an enigma, then would our faith verily stand in the wisdom of men ; but we have received this doctrine of the incarnate Logos into our very souls, and we feel akin to it, as if we ourselves felt some electric thrill from the very centre of being. We do not expect the Christian churches to ask outside men what they are to believe ; the churches are esoteric, they belong to an inner thought, to an inner shrine, to a temple within a temple, to a sanctuary in which words would be a trespass, in which silence is worship. If any Christian professors hold their beliefs merely in their own hands or merely in their organs and catechisms and standards and schedules, the thief will steal the whole property, we shall have various forms of unbelief and hostility and aversion and not-know-ness, especially that kind of not-know-ness that does not want to know, because if it did know it would have to give up its immoralities and corruptions, for God and Dagon cannot live in the same house.

We believe in the deity of Jesus Christ. I worship my Saviour so deeply and lovingly that I often call Him my Lord and my God, and He never rebukes me. I could not believe in the mere humanity of Jesus Christ ; He was too much and claimed too much for that ; I should be uneasy if I held that doctrine, really profoundly disturbed, and I should be like a house divided against itself. But when by faith

and love I enter into a perception and recognition of His proper deity, then He is my Saviour, my Priest, my King, my Alpha and Omega, my All in All. I know there are difficulties, and I know there are mysteries, and I know that I could vex and puzzle myself by many a cross-examination, but looking at the total of things, so far as it is available to my intellectual capacity, I say no conception so utterly satisfies my whole nature as the conception that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and that we have as it were seen Jesus, and hold Him as the image of the invisible God.

If I did not believe this conception of the personality of Jesus Christ I could not preach Him, I should feel that I had no message, no inspiration, that I was simply a repairer of tumbling walls and hedges wind-blown, I should feel that I was simply a jobber, going around to ask people if I might make a livelihood by repairing the dilapidations of their beliefs, I should feel degraded and self-insulted, and I should know that I was making money by false pretences. But if I can take with me in my own conception and in the security and strength of my own love a living Saviour, Christ the Lord, the Image of God, in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, I feel that I have something to say that entitles me to stop the noises of the world that I may declare this music and win human hearts to this trust and joy. We know God by experience as well as by revelation and incarnation; we live the life, we know the ups and downs of human progress, we have felt the pain and the sorrow, the agony and yet the joy of living, we have felt that there were times when we were utterly self-helpless, when the darkness was a burden and the valley a pit of despair; and if in these hours and experiences we have felt that God as revealed in Christ has done us more good by way of inspiration and encouragement and cheer than any other conception has done, we are bound as honest men to say so. Let Israel say so. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. This is a testimony we can neither mutilate nor stifle.

PRAYER.

O THOU that hearest prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come. All flesh is in necessity, necessity is always pain, and our pain cannot cure itself: is there no balm in Gilead? is there not a Physician there? All flesh cries unto the Lord, Save us, we humbly beseech Thee! When there was no eye to pity and no arm to save, Thine own eye pitied and Thine own arm brought salvation, and to-day we stand in the ranks of men that are saved. We would not forget our Saviour, we would not allow the Cross by which our salvation came to pass away as a vision no more remembered; we would live at the foot of the Cross, our eyes would fasten themselves in holy expectancy upon the Cross and the priesthood and the triumph of Christ. We come to Thee because Thou alone canst supply all our need: for a time we had forsaken Thee, Thou Fountain of living waters, we hewed out to ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that could hold no water; but now we have returned to the wellhead, the spring concealed in eternity and that cannot be exhausted. If we have not it is because we ask not or because we ask amiss; Thine own invitation is an infinite hospitality; Thou givest unto all men liberally, and Thou dost neither begrudge nor upbraid; we would therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Every time is a time of need, every hour brings its own poignant cry, every moment is a prayer addressed to Thy throne, whether in words or in dumb sighs or in silent uplifting vision. May we therefore at all times find grace to help our poor life in all its necessity and pain, its struggle and disappointment, its fear and its occasional woe. For what Thou hast done we will take the cup of deliverance and call upon the name of the Lord, we will number our troubles, and say, Thou who hast been with us in six troubles wilt not forsake us in seven, Thou who hast enabled us to walk with the footmen and run with the horses wilt not forsake us in the swellings of Jordan. Thus we would gather up all our past faith and all our past experience and construct our whole memory into a prevalent argument, saying, If God hath freely delivered His Son up for us all, with Him He will also freely give us all things. May we come into the fulness of our possession in Christ Jesus, may we be no longer outside starvelings wondering what the Lord will do for us, when the Lord has poured out His heart-blood upon the world that He might cleanse it from sin. We will find

all the promises redeemed in the Cross, we will find our inheritance in the infinite meaning of the redeeming love of Christ. Wherein we have strayed from Thy way pity us, for we are but men ; wherein we have violated or broken the holiest vow do Thou pity us that grace may abound over sin ; and where we have consulted ourselves and not Thy Word, let the Lord stoop to us as with a kiss of pity and of love, for we have done the things we ought not to have done. We give our lives into Thy holy keeping ; we humbly pray Thee in the name of Christ and at the foot of the Cross to guide us with Thine eye and afterward receive us to glory. What we pray for ourselves we pray for all whom our hearts love and towards whom our solicitude goes out in a great passion of desire : let the Lord comfort them, bring morning light upon their long darkness, and save them in the extremity of need. The Lord be with those who are in trouble on the sea ; the Lord be with men and women who are mourning great loss of life or health or property or home ; let the Lord sanctify the whole experience of life's day and at eventide may there be light, and may we see the rising of the sun even in the depth of our gloom and distress.

O Thou who dost water the ridges of the world abundantly from the chambers of Thy rich rain, Thou wilt not withhold Thy gracious showers from the hearts that thirst and pine and long for them. Amen.

IV.

THE RIVER OF GOD.

"The river of God is full of water."—PSALM lxxv. 9.



HERE is no scarcity in God. The whole testimony of the Bible runs immediately and urgently in this direction :—If we are straitened we are straitened in ourselves, we are not straitened in God ; if we have not, it is because we ask not, or because we ask amiss ; if any man lack wisdom let him ask of God which giveth unto all men liberally—wisdom upon wisdom—and upbraideth not ; giving does not impoverish Him, withholding does not enrich Him ; the river of God is full of water—always full. If we die of thirst the responsibility is our own.

In the Hebrew tongue there is not what we are accustomed to regard as a superlative. We say, Strong, stronger, strongest: in this poor way we compare our adjectives. In the Hebrew tongue the name of God is introduced as a grammatical mode and form of expression to indicate the superlative or the supreme degree. Are they trees of the Lord's right hand planting? the meaning is that they are the finest trees in the forest, the very monarchs of the wood. Did the sons of God behold the daughters of men? then "the sons of God" were the aristocracy of the race for stature, for majesty, for force, for brightness of vision and for the whole bloom of beauty and of strength. Is it the river of God? then it is the widest, deepest river that ever found a channel among the acres of the world—a deep, full, gracious, exhaustless river, pouring down from an unseen fountain that it may find all the valleys on earth and time and refresh them with an infinite refreshment. We should be sons of God and our work should be beautiful with the beauty of holiness. We should not be content with some poor humanly invented grammar, as, Good, better, best, but should be so good in ourselves and in our workmanship that only the name of the Deity could express our quality, our aspiration, and our capability. "And God saw that it was good." Good is the superlative degree when God pronounces it, for God is good and good is God, and if there is any work of ours that is not worthy of the Divine name it is bad work, and ought to be denounced and never paid for.

Here is a wonderful river rolling past our very dwelling-places, rolling through the whole area of our life and our experience. The whole psalm is a kind of festival song. God is so abundant, so hospitable, so gracious, so plentiful; the whole tone of His sanctuary is plenteousness, abundance, more and more, to infinity. This psalmist has a wondrous gift of utterance. I do not see how he can end this psalm but with dancing and tumult and uproar of joy; and I cannot see how a man can be so thrilled with joy himself without making the valleys sing, and the thick standing corn lift up its voice in praise, and all the fields clap their hands, and all the mountains shout

for joy. He has committed himself to a great task, and nothing but a special doxology can be the proper climax of a psalm so exultant, so buoyant, so infinite in its desire to express its sense of the Divine bounty.

Here is a river unlike all other rivers. It is "the river of God." It is not a common stream; the Ganges and the Tiber thrown together could but poorly typify or symbolise this greater river that flows from the fount of the Divine heart. It is the river of God: it is not man-made, it is not man-directed, it is not man-owned, it is not man-patronised; it is God's, and we have only a freehold in it as God may grant us a lot and an inheritance in this ever-rolling and infinite river of life.

Note all the qualifying expressions of the psalmist. He seems to exhaust all language in describing this river and its tributaries:—"Praise waiteth for Thee, O God, in Zion." But "Zion" was local, we know nothing about Zion in its topographical limitations; this is Hebrew, this is a song for Israel: can the man not break away from his own limitation? He can, he will, in the very next sentence he does:—"O Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come." Now he is away from Judah and from Israel and from the so-called Holy Land and sacred places—out away among the Gentiles, away along the whole horizon line, wherever he can find human flesh he would find human desire, human sanctification, and a kind of human transformation into the very long-lost image of the living God.

Then he says, "Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest, and causest to approach unto Thee, that he may dwell in Thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, even of Thy holy temple." What is it to be "satisfied"? To be filled with, to have enough and more than enough; and what is enough for an immortal soul that realises its sonship and foresees its destiny? Perhaps a sweeter word than satisfied may be suggested by the grammar of the text. We shall be refreshed: that seems to suit better the plash of rain and the roll of river, and the

gurgling of multiplying streams; we shall be refreshed, renewed. To be refreshed in soul is to go back to youth. Again and again we have said, and we would say it in many multiplied and ever-varying terms, there is no old age in faith: faith lives, and there is no age.

Again, he says, "They also that dwell in the uttermost parts are afraid at Thy tokens: Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice." This man must be large-minded, he must be comprehensive in his statesmanship; he will not worship a rising sun or a setting sun, he will worship at the gates of both the morning and the evening, and he will see God at the outgoing, and God in the incoming, and God all between, and he will have the whole world and the whole sky and all the worlds filled with God. He is getting greater and greater. Now he will come down to the earth and say, "Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: Thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water . . . Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly"—the word "abundantly" is in tune with the whole harmony of the festival and the psalm—"Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness, and Thy paths drop fatness": the same symbol, the same suggestion of plentifulness and fertility and abundance and reduplication of music. The whole struggle of the psalm is to utter the unutterable, to pile up words until words give way and the soul is lost in wonder, love, and praise. "They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness"; that is to say, the raindrops come down literally in multitudes—multitudes of what? of raindrops. Can they be numbered? Never; no one drop is of much consequence, but when you get many and multitudes and millions you make the earth rejoice in youth, and laugh because of thankfulness. Verily, if we are straitened we are straitened in ourselves, we are not straitened in God.

We thought the psalmist must work out a marvellous energetic climax, and he does: "The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing." And when he has set all human souls singing the psalmist passes away from us as a man who has conferred

great benefits and blessings upon our heart, our memory, and our imagination.

Now is there a drearier picture in all the fancies which the human imagination can furnish than that of a land without a river? Who knows how much we are indebted to the stream for everything we have? and we do not know the value of rain until we miss it. It is one of the Divine judgments that there should be no rain because the people do not pray. God will not smite them as with visible swords or stab them with daggers that the flesh may feel, but He will simply forbid the clouds to drop fatness, and presently the sanctuary will be thronged, and there will be a great cry of distress—why?—because there is no water, no rain—the rain we often despise and often condemn and often regard as an inconvenience and a nuisance: when God keeps it back all the agriculture known to men perishes in hot sand.

Read Jeremiah xiv. if you would know what the rain is and what the rain can do:—"The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah concerning the dearth." God speaks about our farming prospects, our agricultural plans, our sowings and our reapings, our purple grapes and our golden wheatfields. Why did Judah mourn and the gates thereof languish? why were they black unto the ground? why did the cry of Jeremiah go up? because their nobles sent their little ones to the waters, and there were none; the little ones came to the pits and found no water; they returned with their vessels empty; they were ashamed and confounded, and covered their heads. Why? Because the ground is chapt, for there was no rain in the earth, the plowmen were ashamed, and covered their heads; yea, the hind dropped her calf in the field and forsook it, because there was no grass. And all for want of rain! No grass for the poor wandering animal. And what has God to do with grass? Read the first chapter of Genesis, and stand appalled before the awful yet beauteous picture that God who made the constellations made the grass. Grass is a word big enough to find a place in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, where all the great words are; and God made the green carpet, as well as set up the palaces and the tabernacles of fire.

Picture a land neglecting a river; suppose the statesmen of the land should say, There is a river, but we shall not concern ourselves about it, we shall not study the problem of irrigation, we shall leave things to take care of themselves; there is a great Ganges rolling through a neighbouring valley, and we might utilise it, but we will not, we will let the pastures die of thirst and the children and the little lambs and the whole flock be destroyed because we will not utilise the stream which God has made available to our hands. What punishment shall we accord to these wretches? O Thou judge of the high court of earth, pronounce judgment upon these murderers; they have the river and neglected it, they might have utilised it and did not, and they gloried in their neglect and in their shame; take Thou up the seven lightnings of heaven and blind these men and drive them into outer darkness, for they let the people perish when they might have refreshed and renewed their lives. Let us not be too severe upon these persons; this is the very thing which many of us are doing! The life ignores in many instances its sources of blessing: God has put great opportunities within our reach and we have neglected them, we have folded our arms and cried for slumber, we have made indolence our altar and laziness our creed; what should be said to us in the matter of starving and killing our own souls? We might have built our house by the river-brink, we might have been as a tree planted by the rivers of water, we need never have seen when drought came. If we have neglected these opportunities what should be done to these wicked servants? Leave them to their own condemnation! Conscience is hell; self-reproach is the beginning of despair. We knew the right, and did the wrong; we might have hastened to the river, instead thereof we fled into the burning desert.

Think of the responsibility of having such a river! The Word of the Lord is a great river running through all the acreage of our daily life. The Word of God is the river of God; the Word of God would refresh us and gladden us and satisfy us, and we should feel as if we were in a banqueting-house, having spread before us the whole fatness of the heart of the Divine

love. This opportunity is given to us, and it is for us to say yes or no. I have spread my feast, I have killed my fatlings, I have sent forth my evangelists to call men to the feast, and I have made waters break out in the desert, and I have found for my people honey where there was no bee or no flower to make it; I found it for them; if they say no and turn away, what hell is hot enough for ingratitude so base? Do you suppose that we are called upon to make our own streams and rivers of wisdom and grace and blessing? Then indeed we shall be engaged upon a fool's errand. It is God's river, God's house, God's air, God's grass, God's bounty; and God never does anything with a slack hand. I know that He sent out His invitation once, and it is still ringing in the ear of the ages—"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and He will abundantly pardon." Multiply the pardon He will give, one pardon upon another, till the sin which it pardoned is lost beyond recall.

What say you, then? What of the responsibility of having such a river rolling through our whole life? God's abundance is greater than our necessity, God's answer makes our prayer look small; when we have said all we have to say, and think we have piled our supplications and desires heaven-high, and that we shall tax the resources of the Eternal to meet our demands, lo, one whispered breath of answer from God's heart dissolves the mountain we have piled, and we forget the littleness of our prayer in the infinitude of God's answer. Why will we build up ourselves against God? Who shall carry his own little manufactured vessel and catch the whole cloud of heaven within its small and contemptible capacity? Who can number the drops of rain? who can count the multitudes that dance upon the ridges of the earth and make them green with verdures and glad with joy?

What a wonderful revelation this is of the estimate which God puts upon human capacity! He has prepared for every man as if every man were a multitude of guests. Where does God pinch and scrape? Where does He so economise that He has barely leaves

enough to cover the nakedness of the plantation? When was God puzzled to know how to find green robes for some of the bigger trees? and when did He say to the little trees, You must stand aside, because it will take me all my time and all my resources to clothe these great pines of the forest? When were the children shut out? We are accustomed to entertain all the older guests and to keep the children away until the guests have been satisfied, and sometimes it has been a problem to us how to arrange so as to be at once economical and generous; show me where God has pinched anything. In every drop of seed there is a forest; every drop of rain comes with an ocean in its womb; every summer is a million summers condensed into one small time. And thus God seems to reason that we are great. He made us in His own image and likeness, and He is eternal and infinite, and all that He has made is as a tuft of smoke before Him, or as a little perishing and vanishing spark of light. He treats us as if we could eat up all heaven, He expects us and has prepared a table that groans under the weight of hospitality and luxury, and He says, Eat and drink abundantly, O beloved; yea, eat and drink abundantly, more and more still; for if you be in God and be aspiring after God, then God's provision will increase according to your capacity, and your capacity ought to extend itself in response to the bounty of the Divine provision. If God had made a little place for us at a little table, and if He had ever said to us, Dear little one, I give you welcome, but you will observe that the whole economy of this house is administered upon principles of bareness and stint and almost grudging, and I want you to respect the spirit of poverty by which my house is governed—There is no such passage, there is no justification for such a suspicion; the whole idea is plenteousness, abundance, fatness, multitudes, millions, the ends of the earth, and all flesh.

This enables us to see the meaning of Christ's work. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. The Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. Never did Jesus complain that too many people were

pressing round Him in anxiety about their souls' culture and condition and destiny ; never did Christ say, How can I meet this great necessity ? The disciples said, What are these poor loaves and fishes amongst so many ? It was the disciples who said so, not the Master. The Master said, Make the people sit down, give me the loaves and the fishes, and see what the issue will be. And they took up more at the last than they had at the first. This is God's miracle of summer, God's miracle of multiplication, God's great revelation of His condensing power. Into an acorn He packs a Bashan ; into one little root He packs a Lebanon.

“ The river of God is full of water.” You can satisfy your thirst there. All nations can satisfy their thirst there. All the passions, holy and beautiful and divine, which constitute the charter of human nature, can be refreshed and satisfied at the river of God. There is a river the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God. There is a river of which it is said, Whithersoever the river cometh there shall be life ; everything lived when the river came.

Brethren, it is given to us, it rolls past our feet now. Shall it bring to us life, or shall we let it pass and die of thirst ? Let every man return his own reply !

PRAAYER.

FATHER of mercies and God of all grace, Thou knowest where the healing pools are ; if the water is bitter Thou knowest where the branches are that can sweeten the stream. Thou doest all things according to a sovereign purpose, and no man may say unto Thee, What doest Thou ? We cannot understand this blindness and distress and utterest sorrow, we put our questions to Thee and receive rebuking answers, saying that we are not right in our conjecture, that the great purpose of all is that the name of God may be glorified. May we find our highest interpretations in Thy throne, in Thy Cross, in Thy wisdom, and Thy love, may we seek for no answer in our own conjecture or in our own wonder how pious soever ; may we find all interpretations in Him Who is the Word of God, the express image of His person. We cannot understand the things that are round about us, they become to us confused and tumultuous and overwhelming, yet through all there runs that sovereign purpose of Thy law, Thy righteousness, and Thy love. Help us to believe this, lest being drunk with unbelief we stagger as men in the great darkness. Save us in the hour of extremity, specially save us from our own interpretations of things ; enable us to read the deeper meaning and to understand the inmost and uppermost purpose, and then shall we find songs in the night-time, and Thy law shall become as music to our souls. The Lord help us when our souls are full of heaviness, when our weakness cries out because of the weight of the burden, and when our feebleness cannot climb the high hill in the face of the rough wind ; then let the Lord be gracious unto us with sevenfold tenderness, remembering our frame, recollecting that we are but dust, or a wind that cometh for a little time and then passeth away. Oh that we might comfort ourselves in the fact that the Cross of Christ is the mystery and the explanation of all things ; may we lean our little griefs against the infinite woe of Calvary, and may we bring our tears to Christ and forget them in His grief. The Lord sanctify to His servants all the various mutations, troubles, difficulties, joys, festivals, of life, and may we see the great end wrought out for us by the grace made possible to us by the atoning priesthood of Jesus Christ, the infinite reconciliation of the heavens, the ineffable music of the sanctuary that stands in the daylight of everlasting glory. Amen.

V.

THE INTERPRETER.

"Which being interpreted is."—MATT. i. 23.



HICH being interpreted,"—that is what we need: a man to tell us the meaning of hard words and difficult things and mysteries which press too heavily upon our staggering faith. This expression occurs quite frequently in the New Testament: "Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us"; "Siloam, which is by interpretation, Sent"; "Golgotha, which being interpreted is, The place of a skull"; "Barnabas, which being interpreted is, A son of consolation." If we were left with the hard, unknown words we should be left in darkness; the interpretation comes to us as a lamp, we instantly feel the comfort and the liberty of illumination. When we heard that word Emmanuel we were staggered; it was a foreign word to us, it brought with it no home associations, it did not speak to anything that was within us; but when the interpreter came, when he placed his finger upon the word and said to us, The meaning of this word is God with us, then we came into the liberty and into the wealth of a new possession.

So we need the interpreter. We shall always need him. The great reader will always have his day, come and go who may. We want men who can turn foreign words, difficult languages, into our mother tongue; then how simple they are and how beautiful, and that which was a difficulty before becomes a gate opening upon a wide liberty. We need a man who can interpret to us the meaning of confused and confusing and bewildering events; some man with a key from heaven, some man with divine insight, the vision that sees the poetry and the reality of things, and a man with a clear, simple, strong, penetrating voice who will tell us that all this confusion will one day be

shaped into order, and all this uproar will fall into the cadences of a celestial and endless music. We shall know that man when we meet him; there is no mistaking the prophet; he does not speak as other men speak, he is not in difficulty or in trouble as other men are; on his girdle hangs the key, the golden key, that can open the most difficult gates in providence and in history, and in the daily events that make up our rough life from week to week. How distressing is the possibility that a prophet may have been amongst us, and we may have mistaken him for a common man! How much more we might have elicited from him if we had listened more intently to his wonderful voice! What miracles of music he might have wrought in our nature; but we take the prophet sometimes as a mere matter of course: he is a man in a crowd, his speciality we overlook, and we know not that he is talking to us from the mountain of the heavens, from the altar of the temple unseen.

We want the same prophet to put all the unbuilt and chaotic material of life into shapeliness and into statuesque music. What masses of material are lying about us without shape and without purpose, and we are not strong enough or wise enough to handle them and bring them to right uses and issues. The interpreter must see the soul of things; he must not be easily discomposed, he must live away from the tumult of appearances: the battle is not fought by the great general mixing in the fray, but away yonder, it may be, in some little canvas tent, it is there that the whole idea is seen, and the whole apparatus brought to bear and the whole issue first revealed. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, whence cometh my help," I will ask some godly prophet to assure me that God is in the tent yonder, far away beyond the stars, and that He is watching the whole fight, and that He will bring His own cause, which is the cause of righteousness and purity and beneficence, to honour and enthronement and coronation.

In life there is a great place for the interpreter; in all life there is a sanctuary in which such a man can exercise his ghostly ministry. This house called Nature needs an interpreter. The grass is more than

grass, herbage is more than herbage ; it is beauty, it is fruit, it has a mission to man and beast, and nature needs a man who can understand her mutable appearances, her ever-changing voices, her silent but progressive and inevitable processions, so that she never halts long at one place, but is continually moving on to the old age of completion and the youth of a new beginning. We want some men who can read nature to us religiously, who can find tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, good in everything—a wondrous parable interwrought with all that is visible and mutable and measurable. Understand that the present uproar does not exhaust the purpose of God. The uproar is on the way to music; the tumult neither begins nor ends the circuit of God. He means to subdue all things unto Himself; the Saviour is on the mediatorial throne, interesting Himself in all the struggling, pathetic prayers of earth, and working up these prayers into great prevalent supplications; and when He has completed His mediation He shall rise from His throne and deliver up the kingdom to God and His Father, and God shall be all in all. Do not interrupt Divine Providence; do not stop the literature of God at a comma or at a semicolon; let the massive paragraphs roll on until they have come to the full meaning of the heart of God; then say, What think ye of the temple which God has been building in the night-time and in the fury of the gale? Let us pray for patience; good waiting is good praying.

The interpreter is the sent of God. Interpretation is not a universal gift. Nearly every man can go to the dictionary for the meaning of words, but the dictionary is always poorest when we want it most. The dictionary cannot explain any word right into the heart. It can give you equivalent words, or words that grade into one another, or words that help one another to some higher definition than themselves; but interpretation is a divine gift: it is genius, it is a divine trust. Few men can read. All men within the compass of practical civilisation can read words, but that is not reading in the true and deep sense. We must read the soul out of the words, and read the soul into our souls, and catch the higher meanings and be

struck dumb with rapture and with ecstasy. The speaker is often mightiest when he is silent; the apostle is an apostle reordained when he is caught up into the third heaven and the seventh heaven, and when he comes back dumb with intelligence, having seen so much that lies beyond the word-line, beyond the verbal horizon, and which he says he cannot put into the words of common time and common space, for in very deed they were not lawful to be uttered. Who can express ecstasy? who can give the full range in expressive words to the rapture of his love and to the satisfaction of his answered prayer? We need the poet. The poet is not a rhymster: the poet is a reader; he knows what words to emphasise, what colour to throw into every tone, and he stops our vulgarity as he would stop blasphemy, that he himself may read to us the great words of the love of God. Of course the poet has often a sorry time of it in a world so rough, so unrefined, and so irreligious. The idealist is scorned out of the way. The age has come to love a certain little idol which is called practicalness. Men call out for something practical; they rebuke things that are supposedly academic and ideal and transcendental; not knowing that if a thing is wrong metaphysically it never can be right practically. The bridge that ignores mathematics allows its passengers to fall into the river. We need the idealist, the man who tells us to go back to our principles and our first and deepest conceptions of things if we would realise tranquility and enjoy a really intelligent and profound rest. At present we are taken up with details; we are managers, not statesmen; we arrange and calculate things, we do not cause our souls to go back into the temple of the Logos, the innermost house of the Divine philosophy, and to work from that centre through all the noise and upheaval and tumult of a most unruly life. If I were to tell certain men to live their principles, they would smile at the innocent suggestion. If I were to say to a certain type of soul, Do not longer be perplexing and vexing yourself with arrangements and calculations and new disposals of circumstances and crumbling and dilapidated environments, but go back and live in God, I would be speaking in a tongue that in very deed needs an interpreter. But until we do get back to that state of living, moving,

having our being in God, we shall be troubled by every new infidel, we shall be at the mercy of the thief and of the moth which break through and corrupt our spiritual treasures, we shall be building our little house upon a swamp, or we shall be putting up some little ornamental villa on the slopes of a volcano ready to explode; we shall, as the apostle says, be driven about by every wind of doctrine. What we have to do is to go into the innermost soul of things, and that innermost soul is God. Have we God in our hearts? do we live in God? or are we trying to checkmate some poor struggling rival? Shall one little sect try to get ahead of another little sect by some fantastic suggestion and movement of the pieces upon the board? and shall we try to bring in the kingdom of heaven by endless and verbose resolutions? Or shall we get back to the simple, primitive, but all-useful and all-potent idea of living in God, and leaving God to show us how the world is to be ruled and directed, converted and sanctified and brought back, a wandering star and prodigal no more, set in the family of heaven?

We need more poetic, ideal reading of things. Herein the preacher ought to serve a great purpose in the intellectual and social and religious life of the nation. The preacher as an interpreter will never lose his place; the preacher as a rival will often be second or tenth in the list. The preacher as an interpreter must keep his first place because he is ordained of God to retain the primacy. Preaching, in the parabolic, ideal, and spiritual sense, includes everything; it carries its baskets filled with fragments, carries by the grace and authority of God its fiat to rule confusion into order and speak clouds into stars. But the preacher must keep to his function; the preacher must remember that, it is his business to find out the meaning of the Divine Word and to deliver it in the mother tongue. The preacher must know that he will become a mighty man in the degree in which he is mighty in prayer, mighty in sympathy, and mighty in the Word of God. Woe, woe! to the Church when a Scriptural ministry is undervalued! The Word of God is the strength of the Church, the strength of the ministry, the strength of the individual heart. Therefore let the preacher live with God; let

him study history; let him not be a man given to alarmist and panic feelings; let the minister be quiet, let the preacher be tranquil, whoever else be excited. The greatest conception of preaching is that the only tranquil man in the audience is the preacher; he is the centre of rest so far as that assembly and that religious exercise may be concerned. So the pulpit is not a little panic-stricken invention and momentary timidity, looking peepingly out of the church-window to see how it can best save itself when the flood rises and when the wolves are in full pack and run. The pulpit of God has nothing to fear; the pulpit cannot be suppressed; the pulpit, when properly used, cannot be subdued or outrun or outshone. If the points in human life are a thousand, the pulpit speaks to the whole thousand to-day and to-morrow and next year and over the whole area of the ministry, and there is nothing left in human life that has not had its chance of being redeemed, restored, and sanctified.

It is the prophet's business to interpret things to us, to tell us that everything has been from the beginning, to assure us that there are no surprises in Providence, to calm our hearts with the deep conviction that God has seen the end from the beginning, and that nothing has occurred on all this theatre of time which God did not foresee and which God cannot control. The devil is but a black servant in the kitchen of God; the devil has limited chains; he counts the links, he would like to make seven eight, he strives to strain the links into greater length, he cannot do it, he was chained at the first, he has been chained ever since, he will be chained for ever—hallelujah! the Lord reigneth! There is but one throne, and all hell is subject to the governance and the authority of that throne.

Now always remember in following the interpretation of things that a flower may be looked at poetically as well as botanically. For want of knowing that, we have fallen into all kinds of bewilderment and confusion. Hear the botanist: he has a long name for nearly every leaf; he takes all the leaves out of their places, and the stamen and the pistils and all the various parts; he labels them all, and all in foreign languages without any hint at interpretation; and when

he has murdered the flower and labelled the murdered pieces, he calls it botany! The poet never takes the flower to pieces; the poet looks at the flower as a whole, inhales the fragrance, interprets the colour, hears the silent music, turns the whole flower into a parable and a picture and a dream, and multiplies the summer seventyfold, yea, an hundredfold, by his faculty of idealisation and interpretation. But the poet, not the botanist, sees the flower. The child may be interpreted physiologically and made nothing of, or he may be interpreted religiously, ideally, and spiritually, and in the process may stand up a man, almost an angel.

When the interpreter abuses his gift he loses it. That is the law of God, that is the law of righteousness. When does the interpreter abuse his gift? When he becomes offensive in his interpretations, when he ceases to be philosophical and becomes fantastical, and wants to find meanings where there is none, and turn that which is inanimate into that which is only galvanically vital; then the man has begun to fritter away his gift, and God will soon see that he loses it altogether. When does the interpreter abuse his gift? When he turns it to self-seeking purposes, when he would make a livelihood by it, when he would keep the secret of God to himself and sell it to some Simon Magus; then God will see that his gift is soon lost, and lost for ever. We have nothing that we are to keep in our own hearts; we have to give our very souls away, and as for our livelihood, God must see after that, and He will do so. I have been young, and now am old, and I have not seen the prophet forsaken or the seer of God begging bread. Distrust all those masonries for which you have to pay. If a man shall say that he can cure you by this process or by that, by a secret which nobody knows but himself, I should allow him the solitary possession of the mean thing. No man can have the true Gospel and keep it, whether it is a gospel of law, a gospel of medicine, or a gospel of salvation. The Gospel sees to it that it must have an utterance, an outrance, an outgoing; because the Gospel will have the whole world know the goodness which it has to proclaim.

When does the interpreter abuse his power? When

he panders to his clients, patrons, or admirers; when he says, "How shall I please these people? How shall I avoid giving them offence upon social or public questions? How can I get round the very strait and narrow places without being offensive to any man?" He is losing his power fast when he asks such base questions. It is not for the man to invent his sermon, but to preach it; not to invent a message, but to declare it; not to concoct a gospel, but to reveal it—come, go, who may; and as for the heathen and those who set themselves in opposition to God, He will dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

"Which being interpreted." We need the interpreter every day. We say, Affliction, and he says, I will interpret that word to you; it needs interpretation, it is a very bitter word, but affliction being interpreted is chastening, refining, sanctifying, making meet for the Master's use. The Cross being interpreted is law, righteousness, pardon, redemption, atonement, salvation. Being misinterpreted, it is to one class a sneer, to another an offence, to another foolishness; but to believe its interpretation at its best, it is the power of God and the salvation of God. Man being interpreted is child of God, son of the Eternal, a creature made in the image and likeness of God, and meant to live with God and to glorify Him for ever. The Church being interpreted is the most vital centre of the most blessed influence, an association of souls, a kinship of loving spirits, a gathering together of souls that love the Cross, that live in Christ, that are saved by Christ, and that have no joy that is not consonant with the purposes of God. God being interpreted is Love.

PRAYER.

ALmighty GOD, we thank Thee for all the words Thou hast spoken about little children. The least star is the brightest ; the humblest heart is the princeliest in all the King's household. Make us as little children ; may we trust Thee, love Thee, look up to Thee, and call Thee with sweet boldness Our Father. Then every cloud will be full of light, every discipline will have a blessing at the end of it, and out of the depths there shall come beauty unfading. We have been too self-trustful, we have undertaken our own concerns, we have even begun to manage life : pity our folly ; Thou knowest the temptation that is laid upon us every day to be as gods. Mighty Saviour, smite the tempter ; for our strength is nothing, and our skill is vain. Enable us therefore hence on not to manage our lives, but to risk them in God. Help our hearts to hear the sweet music that says, Take no thought for your lives, take no thought for the morrow ; be careful for nothing ; stand in God. May we answer that tender strain with willing obedience, knowing nothing, trusting all things to the Father, Shepherd, that in the end on our awakening eyes there shall burn the vision of heaven. Undertake for us altogether, at home, and in the place of business, in anxiety ; and especially undertake for us when we are most conscious of our own ability : that is the moment of danger ; we are then on the pinnacle of the temple, and a breath might blow us down. We bless Thee for afflictive visitations ; they plough up the hard ground of the heart that it may receive the rains of heaven. Some are ill at ease ; to some life is a grievous monotony. Some are full of strength and never think of the weak ; some have tens of thousands at the bank, and never give anything away they can hold back. The Lord look upon those who never look upon the heavens, eyes that have never seen the stars, eyes that care nothing for the flowers, prayerless souls, in whose houses there is no altar, from whose window there is no look towards the summer-land. We gather at the Cross, sweet Cross, Cross of Christ, the symbol of blood, of sacrifice, of propitiation for the sins of the whole world ; yea, though they be countless millions in number, yet the blood of Jesus Christ Thy Son cleanseth from all sin. Wash us in the all-renewing stream ! God help us to live more strongly, bravely, hopefully, generously, and may there go out from our life a fragrance as of choice flowers. Amen.

PRAYER.

WHILE the child was yet alive I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now that she is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring her back again? She shall not return unto me, I will go unto her. Thou Almighty, All-good, tearest the rock out of his place, Thou dost overturn the proud mountain. They say, Thou doest all things well: may we be able some day to say this. If any poor man's faith is lost in the flood of his distress, Thou wilt not rebuke him in anger, for Thy love is greater than our unbelief. Oh that we may stand in the sanctuary of Thy love!—wondrous love, cruel love, devastating love, all-healing love. Thou dost try us, and we give way; when Thine hand is heavy upon us we cannot resist the awful pressure: but, surely, is there not an appointed time to man's grief? is there not a limit to the darkness? is there not a set time for the rising of the sun? Thou knowest our frame, Thou knowest that we are dust, and we have often said Thou art very pitiful; and if we cannot say it now it is because this is the hour and the power of darkness. But Thou wilt destroy the enemy, Thou wilt bruise his head under Thy feet, Thou mighty One. Give us time that we may swallow down our spittle; give us a chance again; send Thou the healing balm, the comforting presence, the inspiring memory, and set round about us the whole ministry of grace.

We say this at the Cross, our old meeting-place, the only place where God and man can meet. We grasp the Cross, we love its cruelty and its pain, and we love the meaning of its discipline and priesthood. Amen.

VI.

GRIEF AND SILENCE.

"None spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great."—JOB ii. 13.



THEY entered into the genius of the occasion—what so few people can do. They want to make the occasion, rather than accept it. Hence the vexation and the heartbreak and the misery of what is called sympathy. Sometimes we do everything by doing nothing. If men could learn this the Kingdom of Heaven would surely have come amongst us. "Jesus wept . . . Jesus cried with a loud voice"; would the voice have been so loud and prevalent but for the preceding tears? did not the tears make a way for the voice? Sometimes weakness is power. God is great, in mercy, in pity, in condescension—greater than when He makes stars and heavens and all symbols and parables of majesty. Grief must have its time. Time is not a succession of moments; it is that, and more: we make the moments, we thus cruelly hurt ourselves by ticking off time into pulses. Time, rightly understood, is a great silent, flowing, gracious, healing river; wheresoever the river cometh there is life. The child cries easily, bless his little heart; the old man's sorrow is greater, but his tears are fewer: he has the grief, but not the tears to wash it away. The soul cries itself out, then stands back in a dumbness that is equal to atheism. Some of us have moment by moment no God; God has for the moment forsaken us. Blessed be the dear Christ, down to the very last He wrought out some new revelation for us, and at the last He made it possible for us to be atheists:—"My God, my God! why hast Thou forsaken me?" Some of us are thankful Jesus Christ ever said these words; to us they are a large portion of the New Testament; they create a great sanctuary of darkness wherein it is lawful to moan and to despair, but all this it may be only for the moment. There are times when we are not responsible either for our own emotions or for our own words; do not stop Grief,

and make an affidavit of it; do not remind Grief that once it said, There is no God. Grief did say that, but Grief did not repeat it. Why do we stop men in the midst of their speech, as if they had uttered oath and binding vow and final document? Why not let Grief have its own wild way day after day? Let the storm cry itself out; we do not lessen the storm by calling it a cyclone; let it roar itself to rest.

Job had to learn to do without things. Is not that life's penultimate lesson? is it not the last lesson but one? We have to do without things that are apparently essential. In our boundless ignorance we say, Without this we could not live; without that life would be intolerable; in the absence of such a presence and such a ministry and such a luxury, life would be one howling wilderness. God has a way of weaning His little ones without hurting them fatally. The way of love herein is most cunning; love is working whilst we are sleeping; love says, He will not miss this so much after I have steeped him in the river of obliviousness. The eagle has to do without its nest; the eagle must be disappointed when it returns to its eyrie heights and finds that the lightning has torn the nest to pieces and the wind has scattered it in contempt. May not eagles know somewhat of a broken heart? The mother has to do without the child. The toy is left, the bauble, the tiny slipper, but the little soul is away, risen in evaporation, called up like a dewdrop, or stolen by some invisible but kindly angel in the night-time. The mother learns to do without it, in a very poor, broken, shattered, helpless way; but still that great lesson has to be taught to that dull scholar the mother, who finds it difficult to believe that any God could take her little child away. She would say, No! any God, however helpless, would pity a dog in distress like this! She needs a little more slumber, some soothing, balmy ministry, some lull, not of mechanical opiate, but of divinest grace; and by-and-by she would hardly give up the pathetic, tender, sacred, hallowed memory even to have the child back again in her arms. One day we shall have to do without the earth. We shall have to learn to do without the place we were born on and lived on and cultivated and made a home of for a handful of years;

we shall have to rise from the earth and go away into what seems to be the infinite nothingness, where there is no foothold, no measurable time, no standard and test of success, nothing but a continuity of emptiness, an elaboration of mockery. It would be impossible for us to do without the earth: so we naturally reason. But that is what every man has to learn to do—to do without the earth. He has always had it under his feet; one day it will be out of his recollection.

These lessons we learn slowly. God keeps His school open a long time. God, as a wise teacher, does not thrash His scholars into obedience and acquiescence; He waits for them, He brings peculiar thoughts to their minds, He enables them to hear creakings and noises and throbbings for which there is no earthly explanation; He never really leaves a soul, though it may appear to be that He leaves souls for a time which He Himself only can measure. He did once measure the time during which He was absent; it was poetry at its best. "For a small moment"; why, every moment is small; but in a peculiar sense there is a small moment, and a smaller, and a smaller still. He confessed that it was but for a small moment that He was gone, and He told His people in effect that they would never know how small the moment was until they realised the everlasting mercies with which it was followed; it was a long moment in itself, it was nothing in its relation to the everlasting benediction which filled up to overflow the awful momentary vacancy.

Job had to recognise the inevitable. What is the inevitable? It is that which cannot be turned back, that which must come, that which is ordained and resistless; it cannot be threatened, it cannot be stricken, it cannot be tempted, it cannot be charmed; it must, must come. We should study more carefully the etymology of the word inevitable—that which cannot be turned; the charmer cannot persuade it to go back, it comes with the force and with the decree of omnipotence. We know this, yet we do not know it; we know it as a great fact in nature and a great fact in history and a great fact in experience; the difficulty is to realise it in our individual, personal, immediate experi-

ence of life. I know that every man has to die, and yet I do not know that I myself have to die. I know it on paper, I know it as a theory, I admit it as a certainty; yet there is a sense in which I do not know it, as making it one of the principal factors in the creation, inspiration, and direction of my life and my experience. Hence the poet says, "All men think all men mortal but themselves." We cannot even resist the inevitable. We can make a show of resistance, we can make a great hedge, and say, This will keep back the flood of water or of fire, but no hedge can prevail against the decrees of the chancery of heaven. "Be still, and know that I am God." We put up against the incoming decree of the Divine court our bottles and mixtures and chymical arrangements and scientific discoveries and mechanical appliances, and we buy more and more, and we heap up this hedge behind which we would hide ourselves; but the Inevitable comes and overturns it and works out the decree of God. Better call it the decree of God than the blind will of a blind fate. If I have a choice of words I will choose the better word. If you tell me I have an alternative, God or Fate, I will say, Does God mean life, personality, sovereignty, love, though often not interpreted, and sometimes misinterpreted? If you say yes, I will choose God, rather than Fate, because Fate is impersonal, dumb, far off, mute, careless, callous, incapable of feeling. Do you give me a choice? I accept the choice and elect to be found on the side of God. In the meantime that choice helps me, and if at last I find out that it is only fate, I have in the meantime had a consolation which not only soothes me, but inspires and nerves and qualifies me for service. I have therefore an infinite advantage over a miserable belief in a miserable impersonal fate.

There is a wonderful ministry in life called the ministry of silence. "And none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great." Grief silences words. Words are modern inventions; words are petty and often mocking contrivances; there is no reality in them that does not exist without them: we would therefore get back to the primal and rest in the sanctuary whose roof is heaven, whose foundations are the heart of God. Silence is older than speech.

Speech came in yesterday, speech is always amending itself, speech is always publishing new editions of its own ventose and empty eloquence. Silence abides, uninterpreted, uninterpretable, grand, majestic, divine. Silence is older than song. Song is a foolish little thing that began to find its poor little toys only yesterday, and jangle them in the nursery of this poor initial world. Song has its place, but it must come a long time after silence; it is very tender and very exhilarating and inspiring and comforting, but silence is the true song, silence is the real music; song is eternity broken up into moments and audible notes. When God had finished His handiwork the morning stars sang together: song was long in coming; song could only come under definable and acceptable circumstances; song never begins until it is really happy or really hopeful. It was in old silence that God built the temple of the suns and the sanctuary of the morning and the night. Silence is older than prayer. Prayer is almost as old as man, but man is only an infant, God's baby. Well, as old as humanity; but how old is humanity? A million, fifty million ages, and fifty million ages squared and cubed? Mayhap; all that is nothing to eternity. A wondrous ministry is silence! Only a man here and there has been qualified for the exercise of that holy priesthood. Said the young hearts that thought they had news for the prophet, Knowest thou that thy master will be taken from thee to-day? And he said, Yes, hold ye your peace. They wanted to give him information, to talk over the matter, to reduce it to gossip and conversation; but he said, Yea, I know, be still, out of the way! And there are people who would ask a grief-stricken man how he is! As if it mattered how *he* is! He is outside the circle of explanation and the miserable definition of expression. How are you!--my God! what does it matter how *he* is? let him alone! hold ye your peace! It was well meant, no doubt; the young men intended to sympathise with Elisha; yes, but at a moment when there was no room for such sympathy: don't talk! be dumb! let there be if you please a masonic grip, a masonic look, a touch divine, but hold words in contempt, and set your feet upon them as upon scorned things.

If some occasions were to end in themselves the

meaning would be despair. Always get the outlook of an occasion; always say, Where is the window? this is a house of darkness, but there must be some cuts in the wall or some glazed opening or unglazed; what is there beyond, outside? this is only part of something else; oh, what is that something else? Say affliction begins and ends in itself, then you have despair, an unutterable darkness, a most horrible sense of helplessness and desertion; the affliction is not moving into health on the other side; affliction is suicide; it kills itself, and it cannot be buried, for no man would bury so foul a carcase. Say death ends in itself, no man could ever go to the grave with any sense of resignation or leave it with any sense of mute thankfulness that the higher life had been entered upon. Tell me that death is only part of something else; then, I repeat, I inquire, What is that something else? Tell me it is but a comma in a massive literature, a semi-colon in a grand document of revelation, then I say, Let me wait until I hear the next sentence. Never interrupt a speaker, never break a sentence in two; let us know what the whole scope of the sentence is before we pronounce any judgment upon it. "The evening and the morning were the first day"; do not think of it as being all morning or as all evening; the light and the shade have reciprocal parts to play and to illustrate, and we must wait until the circle has completed its revolution.

Faith is tried by fire. Until you have lost all you have gained nothing. What you call your gains are but so much stored up to be lost, but after you have lost all God may permit you to begin again and build up little by little a richer treasure and a surer dwelling-place. But is not the loss all the same whether we believe or do not believe? No; in the case of belief there come into the life spiritual ministries, inexplicable agencies of all kinds, suggestions, inspirations, comforts, new ideas, new dreams, new hopes, new possibilities, and along with them a voice which says in whispered thunder, "Behold, I make all things new." We cannot tell what is going on around us; we cannot tell how many angels are in immediate contact with us. I would incline mine ear to

the teacher who tells me that the air is full of invisible and blessed and blessing presences, rather than to the teacher who tells me that I am a tenant in an infinite mansion of silence and darkness. Job's silence was one great unshed tear. Sometimes we shed only one tear, but it takes in all the action of the heart. The one tear may be all tears in one.

The Christian conception of all this grief, discipline, misery, loss, is the best conception I have yet heard of. It is a conception of discipline, chastening, ultimate sanctification; it is something that is being done within us and around us with a benign and beneficent purpose; and if this were all ideal, poetic, imaginative, it is better than the infinite sterility of believing that we see everything and know everything and have found our way into the final revelation of unutterable darkness. We have not an High Priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmity. It is something to know that. "In all their affliction He was afflicted"; that is so, but that is not the true rendering of the testimony. "In all their affliction He was not afflicted" is the right rendering; that is to say, when you are sick He is not sick, but strong enough to watch you and nurse you out of your sickness; when you are in darkness He is not in darkness, He is in the light, and can break up the glory into beams and flashes to help you out of the valley of darkness. Our fathers have preached many a time from "In all their affliction He was afflicted," and they have constructed and uttered beautiful discourses upon these words, and every statement was perfectly true in the spiritual sense, but now we have come to the new grammar and the true translation of the words the whole issue seems to be grander. Just as some men see more in evolution than they could see in what was termed mechanical creation: God is greater to them now that they are able to see somewhat of the beginning of things, the plasm of the universe. And so we begin to feel that it is for our advantage that God is never sick, never infirm, never incapable of doing His work. "In all their affliction He was not afflicted"; He could lift up by His almightiness the worst pilgrim, the tenderest lamb of the flock.

So we come to Christ for help. He seems to be a long way off, He seems to have nothing to say to this heart or to that ; we sent for Him, and He abode still two days in the same place where He was ; when He came He only wept, as the women and the children about us have been doing all the time ; we said, Almightyness is reduced to tears, and Omnipotence has no resource ; God has turned His back upon us that He may relieve Himself with weeping. Then came the new revelation and the great strength and the all-piercing cry, and the resurrection voice, and the "Come forth !" which made death quake and give up its prey.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, do Thou send unto us quickly, in the name and in the power of the ascended Son of Thine heart, the Comforter, the abiding Paraclete, the interpreter of redemption and of providence. We bless Thee for the promised Spirit, unseen but not unseeing, invisible but looking into our hearts and watching our lives. He is the Spirit of truth and of righteousness and of peace, the Spirit we need, the purchase of the Cross: if Thou wilt send the Comforter we shall rejoice; if Thou withhold the Comforter the enemy will prevail, and the gates of hell shall shatter the rock of our confidence. But we trust in God; Thou dost make a channel for the outflowing of the river of Thy love; may that channel pass through our hearts and lives and aspirations, causing life from God to fill all the necessity and hope of man. Wondrous are the words of Jesus Christ Thy Son! The Spirit must interpret them to us, He must read them to our hearts in His own music, in His own tone, with His own explaining emphasis; then shall we see that Thy love has been with us all the time, though we knew it not; then the shadows shall become presences, and masks shall fall away, and sweet, bright faces shall look at us from the very centre of the sun. We bless Thee for Thy Word; we know it best when we need it most; we thank Thee for every whispering tone, for every rising and falling melody, for the whole expression and vision of light and truth. May the word of Christ dwell in us richly, an answer to every temptation, a refuge from every storm, a sanctuary in the very heart of the wilderness. Amen.

VII.

TEXTS EXPLAINED BY AFFLICTION.

"Their eyes were opened."—LUKE xxiv. 31.



HERE are conscious points of vision and illumination in every watchful and reverent Christian experience—birthdays, coronation days, high noon, the summer at its best. Life is not monotonous; spiritual life has its undulations and variations, often strongly contrastive, often most surprising, always precious if understood and appreciated by the heart. We know when our eyes are opened; there is no new creation, but there is the right power of looking at it; the personality was always there, but we did not see; at the best we see through a glass, darkly, but mostly this life often seems to be a gaol of darkness. There is no prison to be compared with darkness for magnitude and for horribleness. You do not know where the darkness begins, how it continues, whether it will increase, where it ends; and the strongest man stands still in the midst of that night-angel, not knowing but that if he took one step forward or backward he would be in hell. There are points in life when we exclaim, "I see it! I never saw it before; yes, now that you remind me of it I am surprised that I should ever have overlooked it." It is the function of the Holy Spirit that He shall bring all things to our remembrance whatsoever Christ said unto us in prayer, in speech, in parable, in providence, in history, in all the wondrous book of experience. There are texts we can only read when we are in the valley: there are stars we can see only in the darkness. We think we know the texts, but we do not; we think we are looking at a common stranger when we are looking at the Divine Lord; we suppose that we are eating supper-bread when in reality we are in symbol and in faith eating the flesh of Christ. So with many a text: the grammarian cannot explain it, the theologian is utterly lost in its unfathomable depths; experience can read the text, tears can see the stars, broken hearts can feel the nearness of God.

60 TEXTS EXPLAINED BY AFFLICTION.

Take an example. "I will send another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever." Permanence is, so to say, the characteristic of this Paraclete. So we read in the Gospel of John xiv. 16. "I am the Paraclete," Christ might have said, "but I will send another Paraclete, another Comforter, and the distinction between Me and Him or between Him and Me is that He will abide with you, never, never go away." You know what it is to have comfort melting away from you in human circumstances. At first all your friends are round about you in a kind of festival of joy and benediction; they empty their hearts upon you, they offer everything that is in the sanctuary of their love, and you say, "The loss is almost made up." But presently one must go to his merchandise, another to his family, and another to fulfil some impending or inevitable responsibility, and another is struck down by sickness, and the thick walls that were built around you are crumbling away, and the loss comes darker and bigger than ever. None can abide but God. He is there amid the broken, shattered ruins night and day, always there. If He were in the broken heart but for one uncertain moment, how terrible would the agony be, but He abides like a long summer, He never needs to be awakened, His energy never fails, He has no need to be reminded of the peculiar circumstances or of the suitable and necessary word and message which the soul can receive and appreciate and appropriate. He undertakes the whole culture of the soul; in effect, He says, "I will watch, you sleep; I will be here, you for a few hours may slumber away into dreamland and wonderland and the summerland; I will be here to await your return, and to open the morning gates for you and direct you on all the daily path." He is the abiding Paraclete, not the visitor, not the guest, not someone who works up to an occasion and is fully equal to the necessity of the case for the time being: He stops.

Take another passage. "I am alone, yet not alone." Can the literal man understand that? Very lamely and darkly; only the spiritual man can discern the spiritual genius of that paradox. I am alone, yet I do not feel lonely; I am alone, and yet a thousand distinct voices can be heard in my soul, not in confusion, but in

individual articulateness, each having a song, a psalm, a prophecy, a dream, a cheer from heaven. You are alone? Yes, but not alone. Who is with you? The abiding Comforter, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Man needs a Trinity. If he were not supplied with a Trinity in revelation he would create one: so near is man doing what God only can do. If there were no God, the highest imagination of man would create a God, imagine, dream, fancy a God. So it would appear as if God had not far to stoop down to us in making Himself known to our fervid imagination, for it was on the point of creating Him; not indeed creating Him as we know Him in revelation, but in some weird, fantastic, it may be grotesque and impossible manner: God is a dream, God is a revelation. What voice was that you heard in the darkness? I cannot name it, and yet I know it. Was it an echo? Partly, but yet an individual and substantive voice. What did it say? It spoke music, it spoke light, it came back with all the majesty and energy and force of genius and said, "Let there be!" and there was. Then the night was to you as the day? Just the same. There is no darkness in God, there is no darkness in any of the angels which He sends to hover above the slumberer's pillow; it is light with a meaning, light shaded into a parable, light that wants to speak, and speaks the better because it cannot speak: a mystery in words, and a total contradiction, but in experience a joy, a delight, a revelation of heaven. There are some things which only the lonely soul can do. The soul that dwells in noise has no message to its age and no message worth hearing to its own family. It is in lonesomeness that we hear the footfall or the going of the eternal Jehovah; it is then we are called upon to interpret the inarticulate and to give as it were shape and form to that which is shapeless, formless. It is even so with man as with water that cannot rise above its own level; so he must shape Jehovah. It is a wondrous process conducted within the sanctuary of the soul. To be alone and yet not alone you will never understand until your whole life has been emptied of everything it rested on and looked to and was sure of.

Take a third instance, from Mark xv. 34: "My

God, My God! why hast Thou forsaken Me?" I am glad Jesus Christ said that, because I wanted to say it and dare not unless somebody had said it first. There are some things we dare not say as it were originally, that is to say, on the motion of our own soul, but when some other spirit or personality speaks, then we exclaim as if in gratitude, That is what my own soul has been longing to say; if I were to say it it would be blasphemy, but Jesus Christ said it and made that forsakenness a kind of sacrament. Jesus was our exemplar and forerunner down to the very last extremity of things. You could not take out that cry of lamentation and obloquy without impoverishing the New Testament almost to the last degree: if it had been all triumph and all joy and all song, who could have followed it? I could not; but at points Jesus Christ comes down to our weakness, and in His seven sayings on the Cross He makes us more brothers than ever. "I thirst"; that is human. "My God, My God! why hast Thou forsaken Me?"—that is despair, the darkness of sevenfold night, the very uprooting and shattering of the soul for the time being. So Jesus makes us an experience beforehand. He has travelled every mile of the darkness, He knows all the solitude, the great void, the mocking emptiness; He looked round to find God somewhere on the horizon, and the horizon had no God to show. How comforting it is to think that Jesus Christ created a place and a sanctity for our very despair; how ennobling to think that we dare say everything that occurs to the soul in its most terrific agony, and God will not be offended. You cannot understand these words until you have been in your own degree in exactly the same condition Jesus Christ was in when He uttered that piercing wail of orphanage. You cannot understand such a text by the grammar. Salvation is not by grammar or by philosophy or by words; it is a mystery dark, bright, as love.

The Apostle Paul helps us also to understand the true meaning of death. He said in one of his epistles, "To die is gain." No man ever interpreted death in that fashion before; that is a new lexicography. That is the way to get at the meaning of words—to live them! When the hot ploughshare rips your heart you

will know the meaning of fire, and not until then. "To die is gain"—to the individual? Yes, certainly, and necessarily, but that is not the meaning of this expression of the Apostle in its entirety. "For me to live is Christ," is doctrine, is preaching, is obedience to the Lord, is the exemplification of all the mystery of Calvary, so far as that mystery can be exemplified in human life. To die is gain—to Paul? That would be unworthy of Paul to mix himself up with the affair at all. Rather he says, No matter what it is to me, I will take God at His word, it will be all right with His saints whom He takes to Himself in sorrow or in sleep, in agony or in the peacefulness of a dream; I am not thinking about myself: to die is gain—to the cause! I am better away; it is expedient for you that I should go away, said Christ, and it is expedient for every great cause that its heroes should vanish, die out of sight and into life. I cannot have it that Paul thought about himself and his personal comforts and his great delight in getting away from the crowd and from the stress, from the storm and the sea, and from the loneliness of the desert; all that is included, but there is an infinitely further and higher truth. To live is Christ, to die is gain to the cause of Christ. Paulism is greater than Paul; the doctrine is greater than the man; the Cross is greater than the Man who died upon it viewed simply in His human and social relationships. He is the King now in the spiritual experience of the Church; He was always King, but not always recognised; He works more mightily from the heavens than He could do from the earth, He must change the level if He is to be of highest service. So He goes "away." A beautiful word, a word in use far back in time and space, though we sometimes think it is an almost local word when we say our friend is "away." That beautiful poetry is in the New Testament; as we have often seen, everything is in the Bible, and it is better to say "away" than to say "dead." Let atheists use the latter term; let those of us who have a Christ use the word "away"—as if a king had gone on a journey and was hastening back to redeem his oath.

In another passage the Apostle Paul says, "All things are for your sakes." You cannot read that

passage unless you read it through the eyes of experience. Whatever you do is for the little child of the house. Why hasten back from your enjoyment? Because of the child. Why hush the footfall of the more boisterous occupants of the house? Because of the child, the sleeping child. And why suspend your festivals and banquets and dancings and merry-makings? Because the child is ill, and mayhap the child is dying, and revelry must not come within a mile of the sanctuary of possible death. And why are you so delighted and thankful and proud of your work, thanking God for it in the first instance? Because you wish to hasten home and tell it to someone who gives it point and gives it value, and if that someone were not there and you had to tell the story to emptiness and vacancy and desolation, the devil would tell you the work was not worth doing, because you had nobody to report the work to. "All things are for your sakes." You bought the picture for her sake, you bought the book for his sake; you rearranged the whole plan of your life for her sake; you would do nothing until she approved it or until he endorsed and confirmed it. Why not take the thing into your own masterful hand? You cannot, it is not worth doing, but if she could hear of it and approve it and rearrange it; if he could say, "Thanks to you, now I begin to see light where there was only darkness before"; why, then you understand the meaning of the text, "All things are for your sakes"; if you were not living it would not be worth doing, but because you live I will try again, and strike with a mightier stroke, or listen and wait and watch with a tenderer sorrow and a calmer, brighter hope.

Experience is the best commentary on the Bible. A preacher who has had no experience is not worth listening to; a preacher who is destitute of experience is destitute of equipment for the pulpit: the richer his experience, the higher and completer his qualification as an expositor, a speaker, and an appellant before the bar of human reason and human necessity. Prosperity cannot read the twenty-third Psalm. There are many passages which prosperity cannot read. It knows all the words, but that is not reading. I repeat, salvation is not by the dictionary, by grammar,

by the mere knowledge of the letter. Who can read the twenty-third Psalm? The old mother whose heart has been cut up seventy times seven with the travail and the sorrow and the woe and the disappointment, and yet the religious hope and spiritual triumph of life? She is a poor reader in the letter; she knows nothing about your breathing spaces, your punctuation, and all your mechanical arrangement of beginning, and rising and falling, and cadence, and mere variety that can be taught in books and by books; but let me hear that sweet, often-ripped old heart read the twenty-third Psalm; if she stops now and then and punctuates the Psalm with a sob, so much the richer will be the minstrelsy, as if it were music from the unseen heart of mercy that presides over and directs the whole universe.

Self-righteousness cannot read the fifty-first Psalm. It can gabble the words, it knows the letter well enough, it could correct a bad reader of the word, but self-righteousness never saw penitence, self-righteousness cannot say, "Cleanse Thou me, wash me, and I shall be clean, Have mercy upon me, O God!" Self-righteousness wants no mercy, though it needs it all; self-righteousness is self-confidence and is blasphemy in its practical issues and effects. The man who does not know that he needs a Gospel cannot hear one. It is necessity that hears. Who heard the voice of the Eastern traveller as it said, "Ho! every one that thirsteth"? What an out-rushing from the houses! because the water-carrier was in the streets and ready to give the water to those who wanted it. Men who had fountains of their own did not hear the clamant voice from the open street, they were not waiting for it, they were not expecting it, they did not need it; but here is a man in whose house there is no water, how quick his hearing is when the Oriental traveller passes up and down the streets saying, "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!" Self-righteousness never heard a Gospel so; self-righteousness could not hear it; it has no use for that music, because it has no conscious need in its own heart for that redemption.

Impenitence cannot read the story of the Cross.

It knows all the bare external historical facts, it can compare one evangelist with another, and is quick in the detection of what it calls discrepancies as between two statements as amongst all the statements together. But impenitence is a poor preacher, impenitence is an empty expositor. Man! when will you believe that salvation is not of the grammar? When will you believe, not in transliteration, but in translation; not a revised version, but a revised vision? When will you make room for the prophets of the Lord, who do not discuss conjugations, moods, tenses, and attributes of words, but who speak out of the tabernacle of God into the wilderness of man's necessity? When will you be wise? Penitence can read Calvary; penitence goes to the Cross, and at first can hardly see it because of bloodshot eyes, or eyes that are as fountains of tears. Penitence can grope its way to the Cross. Broken-heartedness knows when a leader is false and would take that broken heart along the wrong road. Penitence needs redemption, penitence needs the blood of the heart of God. If you are only in the grammar of revelation you are quarrelling with the word blood, vulgarising and degrading it, but when you get into the Gethsemane of broken-heartedness, then you will feel that blood is refining; for the blood is the life.

Until we have some such experience we cannot read many texts in the Book, but, having such experience, we shall read the Book as if it were wholly new, exclaiming, How surprising! how delightful! how unexpected! how glorious! why, this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven! So men become better hearers of the Gospel when they become richer in experience, and men are less impatient with those who stumble in their rhetoric, because they themselves are looking for a gospel, a kingdom, a redemption, an assured place in its salvation. Blessed are they who so hunger and thirst: for they shall be filled, how humble soever the environment and how mean soever the human instrument through which the Divine communication is made to the waiting and expectant heart.

And as with the life, so with the house. The house

is not worth living in until death has had it once or twice in its cruel grip. The house is not a home until it has had a sick-chamber; the house is a poorly decorated house until it is crowded with unpaintable pictures of association and recollection; the house is a great emptiness if it have not a page so to say in the family Bible of those who have gone before and are waiting somewhere for the others to come. A house is not a home that has no record but a record of feasts and dances and revels. A house is not a home that has only a gaming-table and not an altar, a newspaper and not a revelation from heaven, a continued and abounding fatness of prosperity, and no raking of the heart with the hot ploughshare of affliction and desolation and unspeakable grief.

Herein it is difficult to combine both the old and the new. The young hearer does not want to hear the old preacher; his heart has not been much tried, and he would therefore, naturally, and who can blame him? rather delight in parable and in picture and in story than in the deeper experiences and more sacred readings of the mysteries of life. It is natural and it is right. The young boy does not want to go to sleep, he wants to go to play, to exercise, to exploration, to all the discipline and service and victory of life. Then those who are further on, they want to hear the deeper things, they want to have their eyes opened; they know that God has been always just there, immediately in front of them, behind them, above them, that He has laid His hand upon them, and they want to have their eyes opened to see God. What that may mean ultimately no man can tell, but Jesus Christ tells us our eyes may be opened here and now. Once He sweetly said, condensing a whole song into a single sentence, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

PRAYER.

WE come into Thy sanctuary, Lord God of Hosts, in the name of Jesus Christ Thine only Son, our Saviour, our Priest, our Brother. We come to the throne of mercy, and we bless Thee that in Christ Jesus the word throne and the word mercy are one. We need mercy, pity, compassion, the tears of God ; and we need mercy for our sin, for we have sinned against Thee with a high hand. Sometimes we have revelled in sin, we have rolled iniquity under our tongue as a sweet morsel, and we have said in our heart, Doth God know? We have thought that we have discovered a darkness which Thine eye could not penetrate ; we now know that all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do, and therefore, guilty and burning with shame, we cry at the Cross, God be merciful to me a sinner ! But we would think of Thy grace more than of our sin : where sin abounds grace doth much more abound. Lead us away from the unfaith, which belongs to our guilt and our shame, to the belief and the joy which come of the realised fulness of the mercy of God. Thou knowest our poor life ; Thou knowest how long is the time of misery, how slowly the moments are ticked off ; Thou knowest how many hours are in the long day which grief spends : joy has no time, but grief has centuries in a day. Thou knowest our frame, Thou rememberest that we are dust, and we have read of Thee that Thou wilt not crush the bruised reed, Thou wilt not quench the smoking flax ; Thou dost moderate Thine almightiness, Thou dost not plead against us with Thy whole power. Thou art pitiful in Thine heart, and most merciful, though we cannot always see it, and cannot always say it ; yet now and again we realise that God is love, and that love is the only true explanation of all the things that are round about us indicating Thy presence and Thy beneficence and Thy purpose. Every heart knoweth its own bitterness, every heart now in Thy presence carries a sting of its own or some wound half open, wholly open, not forgotten, a wound somewhere in the whole life. We want a message from the mercy of the unseen Heart, we want a gospel which each soul can understand for itself ; we humbly pray Thee at the Cross to speak to each of us in the native tongue of his own grief. Thou knowest us, what we are, what we need, what we might be, and what Thou dost intend us to be. If we could enter into the mystery of rest we should enter into our highest joy. Pity us, one and all ! The strongest

man is weak, the weakest man has not lost all his strength ; Lord, I believe ; help Thou mine unbelief ! is the cry of many a heart. Show us the brevity of time, its utter emptiness and worthlessness, unless it be related to Thyself and to some grand redeeming purpose and service. Pity the poor foolish ones who seek their heaven in the dust, and arrest the hard-hearted who think they could fight out their rebellion and win against Thy law : oh that Thine hammer might smite them ! not to their destruction, but to their arrest and their conviction. Lead us into the innermost places of Thy sanctuary ; teach us that there are places holy beyond all that we have yet dreamed of holiness ; and may we, by manifold discipline and manifold experience, come to know that love outlasteth all things, is the eternal presence, and the eternal and the only sunshine.

And all this we leave at the foot of the Cross. Thou canst quicken it into prayer and clothe it with prevalence. Amen.

VIII.

GOLD AND ONYX NOT ENOUGH.

"And the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone."—GEN. ii. 12.



OLD and bdellium and onyx—what more did it need? Is not this a sufficing inventory of the land? It needed a river. Land without river is sand, nothingness, a great ghastly image of fruitlessness and despair. But if it have gold and bdellium and onyx, is it not fruitful? No ; no more is your life. You have gold and gum and grey onyx and precious stones, but no river ; write yourself poor, make out yourself a bankrupt in the court of heaven. What is a river? Little drops of water. Is any one drop of any use? Very little, but the rain is spoken of in the Psalms as "multitudes." What is the meaning of multitudes? The innumerable ; arithmetic lost in its own thicket, numbers unable to explain or express themselves. Surely it is the delight of God to run these arithmetical numbers to the ground, to humili-

ation, to conscious shame. Yet without these multitudes, millions, innumerable, we could not live. We could live without gold, or bdellium, or onyx, or crystal, but we could not live without a draught of water. It is the river that makes the country. God draws the river-map, and man plays himself with the toys of cities. Man knows where the rivers are; he says, I must build near the stream; without the river there will be no bread, and where there is no bread there is no music, no life, no hope of heaven. Bread is the eternal sacrament when eaten with an appreciative and grateful heart. You have heard of a man choosing a far country where there was water, where there was everything to tempt the outward eyes, and yet the river that was wanting in that Sodom was the river of character, the river of goodness, the river of virtue; and where no such river flows, brimstone is the end, and it is so in your character and in mine. Gold and bdellium and onyx, but no prayer, no faith, no love, no God: what then? Brimstone, fire, death! And we cannot help it; this is not a matter of arrangement, it is a matter of the eternal logic; this comes out of a sequence which had no beginning except in the sense in which God had a beginning. There is a necessity of things, a settled and inevitable flow of succession. Here we touch it at a very vital point: without the river of goodness Sodom goes to ashes and Gomorrah to a forgotten iniquity. What is the river? Little drops of water. What is character? Little deeds, small contributions, strenuous efforts, steady discipline, repetition, unfailing faith, unquenchable hope, and all centred in, coming from, returning to, the Son of God.

Look at these great mountains in Asia and America, in Africa and elsewhere. Why are there no cattle browsing on those hills? Because there is no grass. But is not grass a kind of human manufacture? Not in the first chapter of Genesis. The God that lighted the constellations made the grass. You and I can only do big things because we are little. God can do little things because He is great. Why are there no lambs gambolling on these landsides? Because there is no grass. Why no grass? Because there is no water. Do all things go back to water? Yes, in a certain sense—the fountain, the spring, the well-

head, the dewdrop, the raindrop. O what music! After six months of drought I have heard the splash of rain in the garden; that is music. Yet what is it? Little drops of water. Why are there no birds building and singing in this land in which by the power of imagination I am now placed? Because there is no water. But will not birds build and sing, though there be no water? Never! They turn the dewdrop into a music note, the raindrops they beat into anthems of their own. Why have all the little birds fled away? Because there is no rain. Why are all these poor little dead birds on the roadside and on the garden paths? Want of rain, want of a river. But there is gold, bdellium, onyx. Yes, in abundance, but no Pison, no stream of the river of God.

And yet when the poor preacher comes to his host of hearers and tells them that one thing is needful, they call him sentimental, they call him pedantic, academic, literary, speculative, theological; they apply divers epithets to him, and they are fruitful in qualifying terms; but he, being a true theologian, that is, a student of God and a child of the Divine heart, is right when he says that one thing is needful, the river, the river flowing from the heart of God, the Siloam flowing from the throne of heaven. Oh that men were wise, that they understood these things, that they would see that gold and bdellium and onyx are not enough. They are good, they are valuable, they are precious, they are the gifts of God, and blessed is he who has an abundance of them and makes a right use of that abundance, but in themselves they are a morning without a sun, if so violent an irony can be perpetrated by the wildest imagination.

You may use this metaphor of the river in many senses. The emblems of God are capable of being broken up into various aspects and driven along various lines of practical application. The metaphor is not confined to water only; there are other things that may stand for water in the elaboration of this great argument.

Here is a man who has great capacity. He is a

man of insight and foresight, he balances things well, his judgments are sound, his talents are somewhat even brilliant. Then why does he not succeed in life? For want of the river. What is that river? Capital. He is abler than many, full of resource, very quick in sight and very sure in calculation, but you might as well attempt to sail a great American liner in a basinful of water as to carry forward all the possibilities of his talent when he is in want of capital, gold and bdellium and onyx. You understand that? You answer that you understand it clearly. I would God you understood it wisely! For my soul is after your soul in this argument. The Divine grace utilises all our powers, gives them scope, causes them to grow, satisfies their aspirations, ennobles their uses, and we may have everything but the wealth of God, the wealth of grace, the wealth of character, ability enough, even splendour of intellect enough, but no river of grace, no river of the true gold, no river of spiritual capital. What, then, does it all mean? Ruin. There is no way for splendour to find its road into heaven.

Here is a man who has capital, gold and bdellium and onyx, and his balances pecuniary are so great that he hardly cares to count them; and yet he is to be pitied. Why so? Want of the river. What river? Health! Health turns stones into gold, deserts into gardens; health creates stars for the midnight, and revels in the splendour of the planets; health is a continual miracle, health clears a way for itself; and the man who is being pictured by my fancy at this moment has everything but health. If God would send that Pison, that stream, that member of the great fourfold Eden river into his life, the man would stand up a king. Do you see that? Yes. You may have everything but soul health, real sanity of mind; without such sanity wealth is poverty, gold is mockery, the bdellium gum has no taste, and the onyx stone is but consolidated grey dust. Sometimes we want one thing to give value to everything; sometimes we want the unit to turn all the ciphers into vitality. When the preacher, poor simpering soul! preaches on his one day of opportunity called the Sabbath, that one thing is needful, there is not

a cyclist on the road that does not pity him and shoot past his door with a sneer or some sign of contempt, nor an excursionist that does not say, Ha ha ! as he passes on to revel in the sand and find heaven in the mud. Yet the preacher is **RIGHT !** and one day his office and his message will be vindicated. Meantime, we do see on other levels and in other relations how true it is that the river is wanted, and until it comes all other things may be of little or no value ; nay, they may become symbols of contempt and despair.

Here is a very remarkable life : the man has learning and great intellectual capacity and many attributes that other men might covet or envy ; and yet, oh how dismal is that life ! What does it want ? The river. What river ? Sunshine, the light-river, that wondrous river spoken of in the nineteenth psalm, where the heavens declare the glory of God, and are telling of the handiwork of Him that made them, where the light bursts as from a fountain and rejoices to run its circuit ; that wondrous sleeper awakened by Aurora, and told to arise, and he springs at her bidding, and is as a giant longing for the race. A life without sunshine, a life always lived on the shady side of the wall, a life that has no windows toward the morning or toward the noonday ; you call the occupant of that house gloomy and surly and unmanageable and difficult to deal with ; if you knew more of that poor soul's history you would wonder if by some miracle you could not turn that north-faced house of his towards the blazing south. That may be the explanation of his churlishness ; there may be a religious explanation of his despair. Let us be gentle one to another, and talk in whispers when we talk in criticism.

And another figure which comes to my fancy is that of a man in sore loneliness. He could do much under given circumstances, but under the circumstances which now crush him he can do nothing. What does he want ? The river. What river ? The river of a strong friend. Some of us were nothing till the strong friend got hold of us, and then we expanded into something, and were accounted of repute and influence. Young

men need a strong friend now and then, a great kindly soft grip that means in its silence, I will help you; let your heart not be troubled, put your confidence in me, I am an older man and stronger than you: young man, I say unto thee, Arise! These are the voices we have heard, these are the appeals to which God has enabled us to respond; and when the river of a loving, helpful friend has run through the desert of our life, behold the little shrubs began to grow, and out of nothingness apparently there came grass and herbage for cattle and gardens and green banks halfway up the mountains. You see that? Clearly. Take care that you do not see it to your destruction, because out of thine own mouth I may be able to convict thee and condemn thee. There is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother, there is a Friend accessible to all, the name, unchangeable, is Jesus of Nazareth, whom the Jews murdered, but whom God offered up in sacrifice: He is the Friend of all. To some this will sound at present mere sentiment, but I will come again and see them on a darker day, and then I will put the same opportunity before them, and they, receiving it under different conditions, may be enabled to make good use of it.

Now if all things depend upon water in a very large sense, why may not the soul depend upon faith? Why not? You want to be rational and logical and sequential in your talk, and cogent in your reasoning and conclusions. I bind you to this inquiry. If in what we call nature the river may be of such momentous and even infinite consequence, may not faith be of supreme consequence to the development, the culture, the advancement, and the final destiny of life? You did not think that so much depended upon water, but I want you to think that so much may depend upon faith. Is faith a human word? It is not; faith is not dreamed by human imagination, faith is the gift of God, faith is all the senses in one and crowned with a *plus* quantity. We walk by faith, not by sight; this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith; the just shall live by faith: a new term because a new doctrine, a new possibility, a new aspect of God.

Ah! there is infinite need of a great comfort-river in

life. By a comfort-river I mean the river of Divine grace, Divine sympathy, conscious Divine nearness. And we may have all things, and yet not have that comfort-river, and therefore the all things become useless things and bitter, grim, ghastly mockeries. What will gold and bdellium and onyx do for you when the child is dead? What child is that? The only child, the one child in the house. Now go get comfort from your pictures; go, hold colloquy with your mahogany; go and hear your own footfall on the resounding staircase and talk to it, and say, This echo is my God! You cannot, there is a voice in you, louder, sweeter than you have yet heard: it is conscious necessity shaping itself into partly conscious prayer. Let the atheist meet you in your necessity and say, It is all matter of nature, all matter of controllable or uncontrollable accident; what is done cannot be undone. Does that talk satisfy you? or would you rather hear one of the old sermons in the despised church you left some years ago: "Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven"? That may be true! "And Jesus called a little child unto Him"—He may have called this dear little pale blossom that lies on this pillow. That is better talk; that is the music that finds the heart! There is a place at which atheism leaves you; there is the place that faith finds you, drops its visor, its mask, and looks at you as a guardian angel. I would follow that faith. When long-linked hearts are severed for the moment, what speech has the atheist to make? The Christian leads the soul by the river of God, by the river of comfort, by the waters of heaven. Can the comfort come all at once? No. When Jesus heard that Lazarus was dead He abode two days still in the same place. So I have known the spring linger when I wanted her, with her buttercups and daisies and golden flowers and purple violets; she abides still in the same place, but on the third day she will be here, and after a few natural tears she will take up the earth into her lap, and clothe that loved earth with all her flowers and blossoms, and in that reclothing we shall forget the two days of misery during which we waited for her.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we thank Thee that Thy thought is higher than our thought, for our thought often grovels in the dust and is ashamed of itself, is without courage or hope or faith ; sometimes it hides itself in the valley which shuts out the sky, the cold dark valley where no bird sings, where no friend salutes his fellow pilgrim. We thank Thee that Thy way is not our way : Thy way is exalted above the heavens, it is a way of light and flowers and morning and joy and infinite beneficence. Who can by searching find out God ? who can find out the Almighty unto perfection ? There is no searching of Thine understanding ; the river of God is full of water. Thou art able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think ; if we are straitened we are straitened in ourselves, we are not straitened in God. Thy mercy endureth for ever, Thy compassions are as a great deep, an ocean of tears, an infinite sea of pity. Yet we know not all Thy way, nor can we find it out, but where we cannot see Thee we would live by faith, walking by faith and not by sight ; we would have a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness and wherein may be found all the beauty of Thy presence and Thy love. The Lord help us to believe ; Lord, increase our faith : it is being continually assailed by the enemy, strong winds from the wilderness blow upon it as if destructively ; we pray Thee to save our faith, and so save our souls. We pray this at the Cross, which is the one way to Thy throne, to pardon, to purity, to peace. O may the sacrificial blood sprinkle our prayer and make it clean, that it may prevail above our unbelief ! Amen.

IX.

MORE THAN HUMAN.

"Is this the manner of man, O Lord God?"—2 SAM. vii. 19.



HIS versicle is one of the most difficult portions of the Hebrew Scriptures properly to translate. We are not here to amend any translation; philological questions must be considered and settled by philological experts; we are in quest of edification, we are seeking spiritual nutriment and stimulus and encouragement. It is best for us therefore to take the text as we find it in our mother tongue, especially because it harmonises with so many other passages which convey in the most definite and expressive manner the same idea. The idea is that of uniqueness; here is a force which is more than human, other than common, absolutely different from anything and everything we have ever seen before. If that is not the grammatical construction of the original passage, it is the Bible condensed into one glowing and inspiring sentence.

Let us picture the scene in which this interrogative exclamation is found. We shall get at it best by pictorial paraphrase.

David was almost from the beginning a fighting man, a great soldier, a formidable warrior; now he has come upon a period of rest; it will be a short Sabbath the old soldier will enjoy, he will be at the Philistines early to-morrow morning; meanwhile, he is at rest, he is in a mood of contemplation, he is reminiscent, his soul glows with a memorial, and whilst he dwells upon that memorial with grateful rapture a new idea seizes the soul of the poet. "Nathan," said he, and Nathan answered, "My lord the king." And the king answered Nathan and said, "This will never do; I dwell in a house of cedar, quite a king's house, but, Nathan, my soul is sad to-day, for the ark of the Lord dwells amongst cur-

tains, mere screens, a shelter not worthy the name of shelter, rags that flutter in the wind; the holy ark is barely concealed or preserved from the roaring wind and the scorching sun. Nathan!" "My lord!" "What shall I do?" Nathan answered the king and said, "Do whatever is in thine heart, and the Lord will bless thee." Poor Nathan! he thought he had taken out a prophetic licence once for all. There is no such licence. A man is not a minister always because he was a minister once; he must be ordained every day, every day must be birthday, ordination day, new-equipment day: in everything by prayer and thanksgiving keep in touch with God. They are poor prophets that live upon old inspiration; once in grace always in grace is rather an apothegm than a philosophy; certainly it is not necessarily a spiritual fact. So the Lord had a word with Nathan; He said, "Nathan!" And Nathan said, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." He should have said that before; he was living upon an old licence: surely a licence ought to be annually renewed, we think daily, momentarily, breath by breath. And the Lord said unto Nathan, "Go back and say what a fool you have made of yourself; go back to the king and tell him not to build in my name; go back and tell him that you spoke too soon; eat your own words, Nathan." Ah me! what sadness is it when a minister has to take back his own sermons and his own prayers and his own efforts, and to say practically, "I have played the fool before God; I preached before I was sent, I trusted to an old inspiration, and that does not meet the modern and immediate instance. Blessed is the man who consults God every time before he opens his mouth! Keep Thou the door of my mouth, set some sentry-angel at the portals of my lips, lest I speak so as to please the king when I ought to contravene him and contradict him, say No! Thou knowest what cowards we are when kings talk to us." Every minister, teacher, leader, thinker, should always be sure that he has the immediate and direct inspiration of God before he attempts to utter the counsels of heaven. "Nathan, go back and tell David that thou hast spoken rashly with thy lips; I will deliver my own message to him, I have always taken care of my house, I do not want any of these kingly, royal,

official, or other interventions and condescensions and patronages: I will take care of the Ark." So the Lord had, as it were, a face-to-face interview with David, saying, "Thou shalt not build me an house, but my house shall be built by those who shall come out of thine own loins; thy son shall build me an house; I know he has not always been what he ought to be, and I know how possible and probable even it is that he will commit iniquity, and I will chastise him with the rod of men and with the stripes of the children of men, but I will not cut him in pieces, I will spare him in the extremity of his chastisement and discipline: the bruised reed I will not break, the smoking flax I will not quench; I will establish him for ever; my grace shall overflow his sin; thou shalt not build the house, but I will establish thine own house in honour and fame and glory, and thy son shall build a roof for the Ark." Then king David went in before the Lord and sat down there like a plain man, more kingly because he doffed his crown and flung it at his own feet: and he said, "Lord, how great is Thy speech to me! what an ocean of love is this which rolls over the whole area of my life! Thou art not only blessing me, but Thou art blessing those who come after me, Thou art establishing my house in the person of my son and his sons: is this the manner of man, O Lord God? How different from man! Thy punishments are gracious, Thy mercy endureth for ever; there is none like Thee, neither is there any God beside Thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears; and what one nation in the earth is like Thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to Himself." It was better to come face to face with God. Sometimes we have to say even to the old prophets, Stand back! to-day I have a personal appointment with heaven. We need not be rude to the venerable prophets and the sweet-singing minstrels, but there are times when we have to say to our dearest friends, I must go alone, for I have an appointment with the Father; stay ye here in a lower place while I go up and worship yonder. There are lonely hours in life, there is a war in which there is no discharge; there is an act in which no heart can accompany us; the last three steps alone, and then the city of the summer!

It is even so with this whole matter of mediation and ministry and prophecy and priesthood ; all useful in their own way and at their own time, but there are moments when we must be alone with God, and there are promises which if heard by two would be defeated by the very act of listening.

This is the pictorial paraphrase of the text. The penetrating question is that which David uttered, "Is this the manner of man, O Lord God?" The power of the Biblical religion is its distinctiveness. God will not be mixed up with other gods; Jehovah will not sit in a row with other and competing deities made of mud; He stands alone, His note higher than any other music, for out of His lofty note all other true music streams. It is a very curious thing that there are many persons to-day who have a great objection to the word supernatural; surely they are inventing ghosts by which to scare and terrify their own souls. Why invent imps that shall beat the air and make all things quiver as if under the spell of a great terror? You may reject the supernatural and get some credit for being intellectual for doing so, but you cannot escape the superhuman. The word supernatural you can get rid of by some fantastic intellectual effort or in the course of some stomachic nightmare, but you cannot get rid of the superhuman. Now what is the difference between the superhuman and the supernatural? The superhuman? you say interrogatively, and I reply, Yes; did you roll up the stars into their places? did any man set these lamps where you find them? can you open the gate of the morning? can you create a channel for the sea? can you seize in its course the thunder-flash which affrights the nations? can you bring in the little maiden—sweet, fair-faced maiden—called the Spring? Who did bring these things to pass? who did set the stars in their places and cause the seasons to come in due procession? Man? Never! Then is there any thing, force, quantity, superior to man, bigger than man, capable of doing more than man can do? Evidently; here are facts. Who domed that sky? who lighted it? who keeps it going? If you reply, Nature; then Nature is superhuman, or more than

human, and is doing more than man can do; and if you say, A personal Creator, Governor, Father, Saviour, you at all events rise to a higher poetry, you utter a grander intellectual conception. It is always surprising to find how people will do under one name what they would scorn to do under another. It is simply astounding that men who can receive the superhuman should repel or denounce the supernatural; they are the victims of a phrase, they are the creators of the very phrase which has victimised them. The superhuman makes it easy for me to believe in the supernatural. I see so many things I never did and I never could do, and that the united strength of the united populations of the earth cannot do, and when I get to that point, if any sweet, thrilling voice should say to my heart, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," I should believe it; the answer came just when I wanted it; it lulled my pain, it sanctified my agony.

Again and again we see in the Bible that God is like none but Himself. He has no compeer. He challenges the gods; He takes them up, as it were, in His fingers, and nails them to the walls of the universe and laughs at them, and asks them to come down and assert themselves in fair reason and in miracles of undoubted beneficence. As with God so with the Church. We can only live in our distinctiveness; not wherein we are like other people, but at the point where we are unlike everybody else does our power come in. If the salt have lost his savour, his weight will do nothing for him or his whiteness; his reputation was founded in his savour; that gone, cast him out and let men tread him under foot. You must not try to make God like man, nor must you endeavour to make the God of the Bible like the gods of the heathen. The God of revelation astounds even His most reverent prophets and minstrels by His mercy, His tenderness, His power, and His pity.

It is the same throughout the whole circuit of human inquiry. We might say, for example, of the Bible, Is this the manner of our books? There is no book like it; it is so curiously composed, it is

hardly composed at all; it seems to fall into place in great star-quantities; we cannot trace its genesis, its intellectual evolution, and its literary polish in its full verbal accomplishment. The Book is so broken without being incoherent; it comes in such lumps of wisdom, such masses of knowledge, such torrents of revelation. Some poor 'prentice hand might have put together a better array of mere letters, but from the beginning to the end God will not have Himself revealed according to the fancy and the wisdom and the taste of man; He will not have His revelation stand in the wisdom of men, it shall not come to men by rhetoric or by polish, by eloquence or by grammar, it shall come startlingly, flashingly, suddenly. The Bible is not a mere piece of literature; in the degree in which it is literature it must submit to the courts of literature. The Bible is not a book, it is a revelation; it is not a letter, it is a spirit; and until we have penetrated the innermost sanctuary of the divine meaning we may have a Bible, but we have no revelation. We should apply the same standard to all discourses upon the Bible. Men have come down to this now, that they speak of polished sermons, finished sermons, classical sermons. Away! these epithets do not fit any sermon that comes from the heart of God and from the agony of the Cross. The preacher is not a dealer in alabaster, he is not a hireling sculptor; he is the medium, chosen of God and ordained of Christ, of a great special unique revelation that cares nothing for mere words as to shapeliness, a revelation that stands in power and is to be tested by its results. The Bible is not after the manner of our books; it is a book by itself, it is many books in one, it is all literature in one statement, and that statement is as a burning bush within whose fiery branches the Jehovah of the universe dwells and glows.

We might say the same thing of the Christ whom we serve and whom we adore, blessing His name as we bless the name of the Father. When we watch Him, when we hear His words, when we study His methods, we say, "Is this the manner of man, O Lord God?" Hear the people, the people who did not care for Him, the people who were hostile to Him; when

they returned they said, "Never man spake like this man." There we come upon our central doctrine, namely, there is in Him something more than human, more than measurable, more than common. When He came to the end of His Sermon on the Mount, the only sanctuary worthy of such a discourse, the people were astonished at His doctrine, for He taught them as One having authority, and not as the scribes. He did not fumble and grope about His speech, He revealed the Father, He declared the Gospel of redemption. On another occasion the disciples who were supposedly familiar with the Christ exclaimed, What manner of man is this! He becomes more perplexing, more bewildering than ever: who is He? what is He? We call Him Master, but we cannot explain the very name we give to Him; what manner of man is this? how different from that to which we are accustomed! they said. We compare sermons with newspapers, as if there could be any relation between them; we compare expositions of the Divine revelation with books of conjecture, suggestion, and partial philosophy; we compare the pulpit and the press, and write essays on the inane theme. Compare the lamest cripple with the brightest archangel, but do not compare anything that is spiritual, religious after the definition of the Bible, with anything that is merely human, literary, and invented within ascertainable limits.

We might say the same thing of the morality of the New Testament. Jesus Christ said, "Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven"; and the scribes and the Pharisees were there, and He offended every man of them. He must be killed! He invites His own death. "It hath been said to you by them of old time . . . but I," just turned thirty years of age, "say unto you, If ye salute them that salute you, what thank have ye? do not even the publicans the same?" Are you Christian disciples going to range yourselves in rows and hold processions with the Gentiles and the pagans and the unbelievers? Jesus Christ created a morality that had a motive; Jesus Christ put morality in its proper place when He described it as the second command-

ment; Jesus Christ took the soul back into the very sanctuary of the Divine wisdom and grace, and having wrought there in the innermost place the miracle of conversion, He said, Now, down, away to the paths and the market-place and the homes of the world, and love thy neighbour as thyself. Never man spake like this man!

Then take His attitude towards life. Sometimes He seemed to regard it as worthless; He said, Take no thought for it. Once He even went so far as to say that if any man would gain his life he must lose it; once again He declared in a startling paradox that if any man would gain his life he should lose it, and if he lost it in the right way he should gain it. There is no making a common line of this Man's talk, it does not fit into any other conversation, it is not an eloquence that falls like splashing water into the cadences of other rhetoric; it stands alone, it is full of paradox, full of mercy, full of light; and no man can interpret Christ until he has been buried with Him in the very baptism of a common suffering. There was a remarkable indication of the specialty of Christ's teaching given by a woman who had no special reputation of an honourable sort: but she felt the power of a new speaker, she knew there was a new voice in the air; she did not know much about the mere personality of the Speaker, but no man had ever looked at her in that way before, or spoken to her in that way before, or read her in all the smallest print of her record like that before. And she went out, and she said, "Come, see a man that told me all things ever I did." Only one man? Only one man; other men have spoken in generalities, other speakers have made rude guesses at my conduct and my course of life, but this man entered the very sanctuary of my soul, traced all the evolution of my nature, and He spake to me so that I could not misunderstand Him; and yet there was a subtle, helpful music and gentleness in His tone. He did not rebuke me as a judge might rebuke a convicted criminal, He had a way of His own; He so spake unto me that I shall not be satisfied until you all come and see Him. No flower in the garden so fair; no star of the night so gleaming in beauty!

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we come unto the blood of sprinkling which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel.

Thou hast brought us into a great place, into the valley of vision, into the garden of God. We have not come to the mount that might be touched and that burned with fire ; we have come unto Mount Zion, the very hill of God ; we have come to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the firstborn, to the spirits of just men made perfect ; Thine is a full house ; behold, Thine angels do crowd the spaces and make the air balmy with their blessings. May we be delivered from all narrowness and sense of imprisonment, as if we were brought within the boundary of time only, without the liberty of eternity ; give us to feel that Thou art the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of the living and not the God of the dead. No soul can die in Thy hands that would be saved : behold, Thy mercy endureth for ever ; Thou hast compassion on Thy little ones, and pity on the greatest sons of Thy temple ; we live in Thy compassion, we should perish without the tears of Thy pity. We bless Thee that we have seen Jesus, that we have touched Him as it were with the fingers of our faith and laid hold upon Him with all the energy of our love ; we have heard the cry of His orphanage, we have heard Him in the bitterness of His desolation, we have seen Him in the triumph of His resurrection ; our faith beholds Him enshrined above all things ; therefore have we occasional joy that promises to become immortal gladness. We thank Thee for the occasional gleam, for the outlook of the sun through all the gathering clouds ; for then we say that the clouds are but for a moment and the light is for ever. This have we received by the Gospel of Thy Son ; He has brought life and immortality to light in the Gospel ; He has abolished death, He has shown us a bridge across the Jordan. We bless Thee for all Thy light, Thy grace, Thy truth, and Thy comfort ; and if sometimes we reel in unbelief Thou dost pity us with a great compassion, and Thou dost restore unto us presently the joys of Thy salvation. Sometimes we are enabled to say, though with sobbing and with struggling of voice, His mercy endureth for ever ; sometimes we are enabled almost to say, The love of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind ; and if we are stopped and driven into hesitancy and almost into unbelief, Thou knowest that we are still

in the enemy's land and under the cruel temptations of the destroyer. We have come to thank Thee, to bless Thy name, to join all the angel hosts that call upon Thee as the God of love. Show us Thy way as Thou wilt, and if we cannot see Thy way may we feel Thy presence, and if we have no explanation may we have the deeper faith, and tell us again and again that Thou dost not call us to explain Thy providence, but to receive it. Oh that our faith might triumph herein ! Thou knowest the struggle, the most horrible conflict, and the almost doubtful strife, yet Thou dost watch the struggle until it becomes victorious. We will think of Thy goodness to us in the days that are gone, the long bright days that had in them the pulses and the aspirations and the joys of a holy psalm. If we are in great trouble and fear of soul we will take Thy cup of deliverances and call upon the name of the Lord, we will count the six deliverances in Thy sight, and number them one by one, and then Thou wilt enable us to say, In six troubles He has been with me, and in seven He will not forsake me. Magnify Thy grace in our grief, in our sense of loss, in our littleness, and in our hours of fear ; when we think of our sin may it be but for a moment, because of the claim of Thy grace, which is infinitely greater than our guilt can possibly be. If any heart desires a special vision of Thy love, why not grant it now, now at the Cross, at the altar of blood now, at a place called Calvary ? If any man is rending his heart because of his unbelief or ingratitude or baseness or sin, the Lord heal him, and restore unto him through faith and love the meat-offering and the drink-offering characteristic of the hostelries of Thy temple ; Lord, give him food and drink from the upper place lest the enemy trample him under foot. If any man would be better, Thou hast already heard his prayer ; all good resolutions are Thine, the heart uplifting itself towards the heavens is a miracle of Thy grace ; we are persuaded, having begun a good work in us, Thou wilt continue it until the day of Jesus Christ, and accomplish it like a finished temple. We need guidance, support, succour ; we need Thee in the inmost places of the soul ; we would that our souls might pass through the outer courts into the very holy of holies, and see as it were the bright shekinah-light and look upon the face of God. Give us comfort in the immediate distress, tell us that it is but for a little while, a moment's separation, and then the eternal bliss. O that Thy saints might magnify Thee in a new song, that there would come into their hearts a new music, and into their voices a new tone ; and then we would say, This also cometh from the Lord of hosts, wonderful in counsel and excellent in working. Amen.

X.

ORPHANED FOR AN HOUR.

“Taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart.”—1 THESS. ii. 17.



DNLY a great heart could have said this. Such glowing sentences are amongst the most vivid and positive evidences of inspiration. Paul was a great father-mother, a great brother-sister, a woman and a man. There is nothing like the Pauline affection; there is so much reason under it, around it, above it; it is so complete and cogent and intense in logic; it is a great flower whose roots go down to the rock. Hear him; tell me whether the womanly or the manly tone prevails: I long to be with you, to the end I may impart some spiritual gift to you; I long to give. “God so loved the world that He gave.” Hear Paul: Dearly beloved and longed-for—panted after, ardently desired. Was he not complete in himself? No; poor is the soul that is conscious of its own completeness and its own independence of fellowship; it does not sign the record with the greatest souls, a poor mean starveling thing that does not know the meaning of completeness. Separated from you, taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, we the more abundantly endeavoured to see your face with great desire. Oh this hungering for human love! Some people can do without it, or think they can; they are but poor specimens of their own sophistical and inhuman doctrine. Paul loved the society of the believing Church; he was at home amongst his own folks; they knew one another, and

when they did not speak they could translate the very silence into eloquence.

“Being taken from you”: literally, Being orphaned. In the English language we limit the word orphan to a certain set of circumstances; we say that a child who has lost father or mother is in that degree an orphan. In the Greek language there was more licence of application of the term; in that language men spoke of themselves as being orphaned when they were bereaved of their children; not only were the children orphans, but the bereaved parents were orphans; thus the eloquence and the music of this glorious declaration. “Being orphaned from you,” feeling the loneliness and the cold and the desolation and the miserableness of being away from you. That is a nobler use of the term: blessed are they who feeling the pain of orphanage have hope that pain may be taken away. “Being orphaned from you for a short time”: literally, for one little hour; sixty minutes and no more: a vanishing orphanage, a desolation that is being consumed by its own agony. “Being orphaned from you for an hour in presence”: literally, in face, that is all; it is only the face that is wanting, and that not wholly wanting, for there is a vision in the air, an outline on the background of the darkness. Now we seem to enter into the very sanctuary of the Apostle’s meaning: “Brethren, being orphaned from you for the season of a little transient hour, in face, not in heart, we endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.” After all, the face may be part of the soul; do not despise the visible presence. No two visible presences are exactly alike; one face cannot take the place of another; but, after all, it is the face and not the soul, and the face that owes everything to the soul behind it. Ah me! there are faces behind whose formal beauty there is no throbbing and surgent soul.

A most tender expression is this of the text, “taken from you”; that is a common experience; “not in heart,” that is a special experience. They are separated who have no heart-fellowship. Proximity is not brotherhood; the man sitting next you is separated from you maybe by the diameter of the universe; to

be near is not necessarily to be identical. Separation of hearts; that is woe; where there is no kinship in love; that is orphanage that endures through all the hours, through all the duration of eternity.

Given such a text, to find in it the points of comfort. Let us read with this end in view. "Taken from you." Is that Providence? If Providence, the comfort comes with the reflection, If this is God's doing. "God is His own interpreter," He has fixed the moments of explanation; He who set the seasons in their courses and the stars in their places has set His own providences in certain sequence, and He appointed by the clock of His own making the noonday of explanation and return. But is it Providence? It may be Providence with a devil's wind blowing through it. Is it Providence that Paul and Silas and Timotheus cannot see the Thessalonian Christians? In the very highest sense it may be Divine Providence, but is there not an under malarrangement of things? Probably, almost certainly: We would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again, but Satan hindered us. There is a prince of the power of the air, there is a prince of this world, there is a bad regality; there is a throne that ought to be burned and a devil that ought to be crushed; there are intermediate incidents, there are events we had not fully calculated upon, there are hindering forces, and with these we should lay our account when we are forming our anticipations and forecasting the festival of souls in which we shall drink to one another out of the vessels of God the wine of His own love.

"In presence," in face. Soon is face taken from face. The door is shut and the face is gone; the darkness suddenly falls, and the face is invisible. Is it only among faces that the devil can rule and misarrange things? Not wholly. Can he sow mischief as between hearts? Yea, verily; it is his gift to sow tares amongst the wheat; it is his business to create suspicion, to fire jealousy, to kindle the viper of wrath in the soul of man. But all this heart-mischief shall be done away and shall be healed, and men shall understand one another better by-and-by; yea, the time shall come when they shall find in their misunder-

standings a new point of union, for they were misunderstandings, and being cleared away the sun is the brighter for their dissolution. Many people are separated only in face if they did but know it. There is an ecclesiastical face, a denominational face, a theological face, and men are separated by so many faces from so many friends. Oh the pity of it! oh the devil's joy over it! The men are not separated in heart; if you came to root questions you would find them wondrously one. They are one when they pray, they are two when they discuss; then let discussion alone, and pray without ceasing. We are one in heart, with Christ we shall be one in face and visible fellowship and open union by-and-by; meanwhile the grand thing is to be united in charity, in deep conviction, in heart-trust; this being the case, all the rest will come right, without our mechanical arrangements and our miserable attempts, trimming and trumping up things in which there can be no durability, until the hearts are brought into happy, intelligent, trustful relation.

Is there any experience in the life of Christ kindred to the experience of the text? I think the experience of the Master and the experience of the disciple are often identical, each being taken in its own degree. "Yet a little while, and ye shall not see me." But we can always see the soul we have loved? True, but not the face, which is the outward and visible symbol of that soul. "A little while ye shall not see me; and again a little while, being orphaned from you for one short hour, and ye shall see me"—the other face, the inner face, the vision face. Our friends come back to us in vision. They do not need the face of flesh; that was rough and temporary, exposed to all the cruelty of the wind and storm and all the plague of insidious disease; but, having shuffled off the mortal and the visible, they come back with new life and a new visibleness. Has the soul no eyes? are eyes only instruments on which the optician operates? is there no vision of the heart, no sight of the soul, no perception of the immortality that throbs in every human heart? "A little while, and ye shall not see me, and again a little while and ye shall see me"—from another point of view, in another light; and you

will pass from the body to the spirit, away from the body to the Holy Spirit. That is the mystery of Providence, that is the wonderful part of our spiritual education, so that loss may be gain, and having lost you may possess for ever in an imperishable relation, almost in an imperishable form: for there is a spiritual body and there is a natural body; when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and the heavens shall be alive with new presences, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory! We must attain to this higher fellowship, to this clearer vision, to this surer realisation of the things which God intended to remain.

Have you no comfort for this heart bereaved of the only little child? Certainly, we have an abundant comfort: you have been looking in the wrong direction for solace, you have been looking into the little grave instead of looking up; because the child is not in the grave, but in the air, in the upper spaces, in the sanctuary hidden from bodily eyes. But if you look in the twilight you will see the outline; there must be nobody with you, you must steal away when the others are talking their frivolous talk and making the air hot with their puerile prattle, endeavouring to cheer you, as they foolishly think—as if a soul could be cheered that has lost. But when these people are at their noisiest, steal away and look down to the south sky yonder, where the whitest stars mostly burn, and you will see the child; or you will see the child in the depths of your own soul, or your necessity shall become as a mirror which shall throw back the holy reflection of the momentarily lost image. A little while, and ye shall not see me; and again a little while and ye shall see me, and ye shall hear me. There is a voice that is heard by the soul; sometimes it is so clear and emphatic as almost to be a bodily voice, but if we read things in the right way we should see that that soul-voice, that psychical music, was deeper, tenderer, subtler, larger than any other music can possibly be.

Have you no consolation, then, for lives long linked divided and shattered as to their outer relation? Yea,

surely, an infinite comfort ; we have come to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to an infinite host. Poor debased souls, we want the bodily grasp, and we think we are most truly together when face is looking into face. That sophism must be destroyed, that delusion or illusion must be got rid of, and we shall see soul to soul, love to love, and no dividing force can break up or cause to flutter in hesitation the great experience and holy sacrament of undivided and completed love.

Shall we know one another when we are no longer orphaned, when the hour's separation is over and done ? Why not ? Will not the holy ones have grown so much that we should be unable to identify them ? Certainly not ; the suggestion is wrong in philosophy and absurd in experience. No time can bear any relation to eternity. A thousand years ?—a thousand years are less than one day. Five hundred thousand years ; even that apparently long time bears no relation to eternity. Every fraction has a relation to the integer to which it belongs, a fourth to the one, a twentieth to the integer of which it is a twentieth : time is not a fraction of eternity, how then should it have a measurable relation to that infinite duration ? Days, months, years, centuries, millenniums, have no relation to the eternal Now. So if a man should say to Eternity, I am five hundred years older than I used to be, Eternity would not understand a word he said ; Eternity has no five hundred years to talk about. Eternity cannot speak about Time ; it is Time that chatters about Eternity. And as no time can bear any relation to eternity, so no experience can bear any relation to immortality. Five hundred years in heaven ; that great sum, according to our reckoning, has no relation to immortality ; we shall all seem to start together ; it will appear in holy spiritual fact as if we were all scholars in the spiritual school, entered on the same day and reading at the same place.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we thank Thee for all our first teachers ; we thank Thee for those who taught us the alphabet and the outline of things, and who gave us water in baptism, and who instructed us according to their limited knowledge. We despise no teacher, we thank Thee for every teacher sent from God, how poor soever his gospel, how dim soever his vision, because he speaks with sincerity and out of love. We thank Thee for a daily brightening vision, for a daily enlarging revelation, and for a continually expanding demonstration of Thy presence, Thy grace, Thy power. We are believers in the great Redemption, our heart believes in the Cross of Christ, we seek forgiveness through the blood of Thy Son. We cannot forgive ourselves; only God can forgive. It hath pleased Thee to bring forgiveness to us through the Gospel of the Incarnation, and the blessed, complete, and final Redemption. We bless Thee for all that we know of Thy kingdom and of Thy grace : we thank Thee that we have tasted of the luxury of service, and of the deeper luxury of hopeful suffering ; if we suffer with Christ we shall also reign with Him. Teach us that knowing the fellowship of our Saviour's sufferings means that we shall see the glory of His resurrection ; teach us more and more that we stand or fall in regard to Christ alone ; if true to Him, we stand ; if false to Him, though clothed with many coloured ceremony and profession, we utterly and finally fall. Help us to be true to the Cross, true to Christ ; deliver us from all narrowness and sordidness and worldliness, and bring us into the temple purer than crystal, brighter than noon-day. Amen.

XI.

THE FINAL BAPTISM.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 23RD, 1899.

"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire."—MATT. iii. 11.

"E that cometh after me." Christianity has always some further man or truth or vision or poem in reserve. You never hear God's final word. This is the very secret, as it is also the joy and the security of eternity. "I indeed baptize you with water": poor water, useless water, except as regarded in a symbolic and elementary sense; mine is a poor baptism, there is a grander baptism in store; when the true Baptist comes He will bring with Him no water, but flame, fire, enthusiasm, the Holy Ghost. "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance"; my little baptism has a place and a function in Christian history, but that place and function will soon give way before the fuller purpose, before the brighter vision, the Messianic idea. As to baptisms, and ceremonies, and sacraments, let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. We must not undervalue each other's convictions; on all sides of great controversies there are competent and honourable men; they differ sharply from one another, and yet they may both love the central truth, the central Person, the one Christ. I do not wish to force my conviction upon any other man, nor must any other man attempt to determine my Christianity by my participation in his conclusions; again and again let the golden rule be laid down, and that charitably and justly, namely, Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. I want no water baptism, I want no bread and wine at my Lord's Supper; all these details and arrangements and economies have in my judgment, not in the judgment of other men, utterly passed away, we have come into a larger baptism, and we now partake of the Lord's

Supper every time we break bread, every time we drink water, and turn our eyes to the kind heavens with thankfulness and expectancy. But my Lord commanded baptism. So He did; but what baptism did He command? No baptism of water; John exhausted that little function, it was enough for him; he was no fire-bearer, he could not bring with him, as Christ brought, the fire from the unseen and the heavenly altar. "He that believeth and is baptized with the Holy Ghost shall be saved"; there the sentence is balanced, self-complete, it is not high at one end and dragged down at the other, it is complete; may we all be baptized with the Holy Ghost! In the meantime, if any man is at any other point in his Christian education, by all means let him be careful, thoughtful, grateful, and obedient: I wish to stand now in the liberty of Christ, in the passion of the Holy Ghost, in the eternal flame of the spiritual fact, the utterest and completest consecration. If any man needs a morsel of bread and a mouthful of wine to remind him of his Lord's body and blood, so be it; I took the so-called sacrament (a most odious word in some of its applications) once; can any man take it more than once? Can you make this love, in all its passionateness and fire, part of the almanac, part of the calendar, to be realised at certain periods and at the stroke of certain points of time? Love sees the Lord once, Love drinks His blood once. I care not who distribute the symbols of His grace. I wish to preach that blood itself, cleansing, redeeming, atoning blood. So that I am not personally encumbered with ceremonies and rituals, nor am I vexed and distressed by this controversy and that respecting matters of detail and matters of mechanical arrangement; I leave other men to be fully convinced in their own mind; great and good men have resolved to follow certain practices, and they must be left to the conscientious fulfilment of their own resolutions; I long for the realised liberty of Christ, for the eternal sacrament, for the everlasting baptism that needs no mechanical arrangements and adjustments, but that is after the nature of God Himself, spiritual: God is a Spirit.

But the point of this text is the One coming after: always coming, always come; a great fact and a great

prophecy is the Christian idea or the Messianic prediction and forecast. My Lord is always coming: What I say unto one I say unto all, Watch. He came this morning, He came at noonday, He will be here with the evening star, or we may be called out to see Him under other conditions, but the kingdom of God is unseen but ever-coming, invisible but ever-descending; and where the kingdom comes the King is never absent.

Now let us illustrate this text upon levels with which we are all familiar. "He that cometh after," the fuller teacher, richer, ripper, gentler, the teacher who we know must come. There is a prophecy in the very soul of man. No man was ever yet contented with the spring as sufficient and final; when he saw the green blade he was right glad in his heart; he said, I have been waiting for this, here is the promise of God realised up to this visible and calculable degree. Will not that green blade satisfy you? No. What want you? The fruit, the full corn in the ear. Are you sure it will come? Certainly! Why so sure? Because the blade has come, and God never sends the beginning without also sending the end, He never sends the promise without sending the fulfilment of the promise; inasmuch as He has given one little violet this February day or one snowdrop, He means to give a whole summerful of flowers, and He will not fail of His word. And so it is throughout all life. The teacher we have to-day will give place to a larger teacher to-morrow. Have we not seen the best and greatest men yet? Certainly not; the men we have seen are but outlines and figures of the men that are coming. That is the spirit of the Gospel: "Hereafter ye shall see" may be taken as one of the key-words of the Supreme Teacher, at once Alpha and Omega.

This is the speech of the schoolmaster; he says in effect, "My beloved pupils, this is all I can do for you, a little baptism of water into the secrets of the higher life, the intellectual sanctuary, the great mental temple into which you will be introduced little by little; you are now hardly in the vestibule, but you are

within sight of the temple gates, and I can only teach you about these alphabets and arithmetical tables and tables of weights and measures, little intermediate and superficial things, the mere conveniences of the kitchens of the world; He that cometh after me will not speak to you of gold and silver and pence, nor of weights and measures and scales, and standards by which you determine statures, He will speak another language, but in order to enter into the mystery of His language you must pass through all these elementary conditions; your minds are now in a state of formation; I terminate at a certain point, and then you say your schooling is over, but in reality your schooling will never be over, your schooling will always be beginning, if so be you mean to be wise men, not merely instructed in the elementary baptism of the multiplication table and the distribution of the letters of the alphabet; if you wish to enter into the real wisdom, then you must accept these things as elementary and indicative, and as not self-contained or self-completing. Grow in wisdom, grow in mental stature; there cometh One after me."

Yet so many people are content with the schoolmaster; they think that the schoolmaster is a final entity or personality in the education and evolution of the soul. The schoolmaster himself knows better; he says, I am intermediate or I am only initial, I have a little introductory work to do, but, boys, hear me, he that cometh after me! look for the great teacher, the philosopher, the son of wisdom, the God of truth—on! There are some people who do not even do the schoolmaster justice; they think the multiplication table ends with twelve times twelve, and if any man were to say, Twelve times thirteen, they would say, You want to be wise above what is written—a little nonsensical sophism which hinders the Church from taking its proper place in the whole progress of the world. Twelve times thirteen is as certainly in the multiplication table as twelve times twelve, and, take what multipliers you please, what squares and cubes you choose, you will find the whole process within the four corners of that little schedule which you call the multiplication table. There is no multiplication outside it, the whole pro-

cess is contained within that little square that cannot itself be more than two or three inches broad. So with elementary teaching, it does not end in itself, it has in it seed after its own kind, it needs only to be sown or planted in the mind, and under the right conditions it will come up a thousandfold. There is no little grain of corn that is satisfied with itself. Have you ever heard the little grains of corn talking? they have a fairy-like speech, and they speak with wondrous ripeness of wisdom. The little grain, the little corn-seed, says to its possessor, I want to bring forth about thirtyfold, perhaps sixtyfold, perhaps a hundredfold; it is in me, it was in me from before the foundation of the world, it was in me in the purpose of God: now plant me and see what I will do for you; then plant the whole thirty of us, or sixty, or hundred, and we will grow as the suns come round and round until you will have to pull down your barns and build greater; we can never cease to grow if we are placed under the right conditions. So it is with this schoolmaster; do not be content with the elementary school, it is time that you went to another academy, God's great seminary is open to us all. We are thankful for the schoolmaster who baptized us with the baptism of alphabets, we now want the higher Teacher who will baptize us with flame, and make us learned beyond the books; not that we shall ever despise them, for no man would be justified in despising the ladder by which he climbed to the top of the wall.

It is the same with ordinances, institutionalisms, preachings, church-goings, and all the elementary arrangements of ecclesiastical and religious life. They do not end in themselves. Preaching does not end with the sermon; the sermon at its best is only a beginning, a hint, a whisper, a high wind from heaven, a great thunder from the invisible sanctuary, urging you to something beyond itself, urging us to practical service and the outward and visible application of the doctrine, yea, to the incarnation of the dogma, the personalisation of the thought. Many people are content with institutionalism; they call it obedience, but it is not; they think they have done their duty, but the man who has done his duty and is conscious of

it and satisfied with it has not yet begun to form a proper conception of what is meant by duty. You cannot go to church once or twice a day, you cannot have communion upon an empty stomach or a full stomach, and let the matter end there; you are pedants, you are miserable literalists, you are living in the husks of the letter: all that you have done may be in itself right if limited as to time and conditions, or if accepted as initial and predictive and introductory, then it may all be right, but to eat my Lord's body and drink His blood, and then to go to gambling, what is that but blasphemy blacker than the soot of hell? We must not be satisfied with church-going and chapel-going; within its own limits it is right, and it may be profitable and helpful, and ought to be so; but he goes to church in the right sense who leaves the church that he may bring other people into it. Thus we must enlarge our opportunities and privileges and give the whole world, so far as it is open to our influence, the opportunity of enjoying what we ourselves have realised in the inmost sanctuary.

“He that cometh after Me.” That is what Jesus Christ Himself said. Jesus Christ did not remain long; who would remain long under these grey skies if he could honourably get away? The Almighty has fixed His canon 'gainst self-slaughter, else who would not be only too glad to get away if some honourable door of escape were open to him? who would not gladly say to the prince of this world and the principalities of the power of the air, Farewell, thou cursed sprite? Jesus Christ was not long here; He was always young and always old, He was always the child and always the Everlasting Father. He returned to the Father, not that He might enjoy immunity from suffering, but that He might help us on a larger and surer scale. Have we sufficiently considered the Pauline declaration, Once we knew Christ after the flesh, henceforth we know Christ no more after the flesh? once we saw Him, touched Him, followed Him, carefully put our feet into His footprints, watched Him sit down, watched Him rise up, and took note of all His physical attitude and representation; He has for ever gone from the criticism of these poor eyes of the body, we shall see Him no more, we shall know Him

henceforth no more after the flesh, and therefore we shall know Him the better after the spirit, we shall now be able to get rid of all that was limited and encumbering, and we shall look at the spiritual idea, and hear the spiritual voice; for there is a spiritual voice that the soul can hear in darkness, in solitude, in unutterable pain.

Jesus Christ therefore said, "He that cometh after Me." Jesus Christ said these words in a different tone to the tone of John. "He that cometh after me," said John; "Whom I shall send unto you," said Christ; he shall show you all things, he will work miracles in your memory, you will under the influence of the Holy Spirit remember every word I have ever said to you, and the Holy Spirit will show you things that are coming. Our English version does not hit the activity and the energy of Christ's own word; "He shall show you things to come" is not enough; we must take it in Christ's own action, a continuous unceasing action; He will show you things that are coming, coming, always coming—a brighter morning, a grander sky, a larger association of the soul with the souls of history and the souls that have passed into the heavens. Do not imagine, therefore, that Jesus Christ did not send one after Him who could complete His work: He shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear that shall he speak; he will take of the things that are Mine and will show them unto you, in a sense in which you could not see them while they remained before your bodily eyes; in order to see the brightest visions you must go into darkness, and you can go into darkness at any moment; it is in your power, so to say, to create darkness, but not to create light; you have but to draw down your eyelids, and you stand in the darkness of night where all the stars are gleaming, smiling, glittering their mute gospels. Not until we get rid of our eyes do we really see. That is the deepest philosophic conception of the body of Christ. We could not see truly whilst we were gazing simply on the outward body: "It is expedient for you that I go away"; you will have larger fellowship and clearer vision and purer joy and a surer possession of all the doctrines which constitute My evangel. Christ comes by the

Spirit; Christ returns in the power of the Holy Ghost.

Nothing has been finally settled until we receive the baptism of fire. Have we received the Holy Ghost? or are we still amongst the little articles and schedules and prescriptive arrangements, ecclesiastical and other? Do we still, poor souls, go to some written book to know what was done in the third century or the fifteenth? and have we to keep up these old black letters? Far from it. What then is our privilege? Daily communion with the Spirit. Do I go gropingly over the mountains of time reading the inscriptions upon the whitewashed posts, This way to the city, This way to such and such a valley, This way to such and such a destiny? do I crawl from post to post searching my stumbling way with uncertain steps? No. Why not? I will tell you why not: I am walking over all these mountains of time side by side with the sole Living Guide; He knows every mountain, every rock, every bypath, and He whispers to me as we pass this place and that, and tells me exactly where we are; I never look at the posts, I want no chalked or painted directions, the living God, the living Lord of the mountains is with me; He knows every grassblade and every pebble, and in His presence and under His guidance I shall reach my home; no mountains shall detain me, no jungle shall keep me as the prey of some wild beast. Church! trust thou the Holy Ghost. I would not trust any Act of Parliament to keep this place what it is, I would not trust any House of Parliament to keep this place true to its doctrines; I have given this place, stone by stone and brick by brick, to the guidance of God whom I adore as the Holy Ghost; and let Him keep the living Church in a living and progressive purity, and under the guidance, not of parliamentary posts, but of the living Holy Ghost, we shall reach the grandest issues and share a common heaven.

Under the power of the Holy Ghost we shall not need any new teachers. The Holy Ghost will give us new vision, new perception, new capacity, new sensitiveness; not some original speaker, but some clearer realisation of the Holy Ghost is the security, the assurance, and the completion of our progress.

And under this final baptism of the Holy Ghost and of fire we shall not need any new Bible, we shall acquire the way of rightly reading the old Bible. Sometimes you do not know your own letters when other people read them; you do not wonder at the reviewer scolding and rebuking you, simply because the reviewer has never read the book as you read it, as you intended it to be read; he has galloped over it, skimmed it, looked at it here and there in parts and patches. If this be so with your letters and your books, it is even more so with the Bible. You would not know the Bible if you heard some people read it; you would say, That is not the Bible. Yes, it is. It is not. I have read it correctly. No. What has been wanting? Soul, fire, the Holy Ghost; let the Bible be so read, and then let it be left to work out its own vindication.

Under the influence of this new baptism there will be no new note of music. There is a set of honourable souls who have been wearing themselves out for many a day in seeking the fourth dimension, and there are many really excellent people, of whom John Stuart Mill was one, who wonder whatever will be done when the seven notes of music are exhausted. I cannot tell even John Stuart Mill what will happen then, but it has not happened. We shall never have an eighth note, and we shall never get to the end of the seven notes; and we shall never have a new Bible, and we shall never get to the end of the old Bible. My dear sir, read it!

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we bless Thee that the morning light brings the morning psalm ; we thank Thee for the music that is hidden in the sunlight ; may we respond to all Thy calls, may the spring find us young, the summer find us in full strength and bearing great fruit unto God. We thank Thee for all Thy love, though we have been unworthy of it, and we have been unfaithful to the responsibilities which it has imposed upon us ; therein we have done the things we ought not to have done, and therein we have left undone the things that we ought to have done ; we have been an evil and an adulterous generation, seeking after signs which Thou hast denied, for our hearts were untoward in Thy sight. But we thank Thee that where sin abounds grace doth much more abound, we bless Thee that Thy mercy is greater than our guilt. Our hope is in the mercy of the Cross, in the love of Calvary, in the blood of atonement. When we heard that there was a fountain opened in the House of David for sin and for uncleanness, behold our penitence listened and our love awakened, and we hasted to find that fount of God. The blood of Jesus Christ Thy Son cleanseth from all sin ; may this be the psalm of our life, the under and governing tone of the whole music of our soul ; and, praising God for daily event and transient incident and withering blossoms of love, may we remember the eternal covenant and the rock that cannot be moved. We thank Thee for all who have obeyed Thy word and lived according to the music of Thy law, we thank Thee for their example, for their heroism, for the inspiration they have bequeathed to the ages ; may we remember those who have honoured Thy covenant and kept Thy word and found their music in obedience. Save us from all perversity and untowardness of heart, and give us the child spirit, the simple love, the all-receiving and all-adopting faith, and may we enter into the infinite liberty of those who know the love and the fellowship of God. We thank Thee for all the noble dead, we bless Thee for the men who have led us, for those who did worthily in Ephratah, and those who were famous in Bethlehem ; may we not fall below the record they have left us, but heroically and believingly may we lift our eyes to the hills whence

cometh our help. If we have fallen upon an evil generation ; if we by our perversity and selfishness have dwarfed the very time in which we live ; if we have spoiled the record of the generations, our heroic sires being all forgotten, the Lord pity us ; if we have substituted a compromise for a conviction ; if we have been unfaithful to our principles, surely Thou wilt strip the bark from our tree, and there shall be no more fruit grow upon our sterile branches. Oh that we had been men like our fathers, mighty singers like the ancient Davids ! Oh that we had not lost our harps, nor hung them upon some willow that they might be forgotten ! But is there no return of Thy love ? Will not penitence melt Thy wrath ? May we not still hope for a great stream of revival from the living tree of the Cross ? The Lord forbid that we should fall behind and be small and sordid and mean, when we might rank with the angels and the princes of heaven. Let the Lord hear us wherein we bemoan ourselves, for oh how high we might have been, how triumphant in faith, how unclouded and quenchless in hope ! The Lord pity us, for we have made that little which Thou hast made great ; come again to us, Thou mighty Son of David, Son of God, Saviour of the world ; let not the race of men die out ; when Thou dost come again Thou shalt find men upon the earth, and faith and hope, Thine own miracles and Thine own living witnesses. Amen.

XII.

THE PSALM FOR THE DAY.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, MARCH 19TH, 1899.

"That day David delivered this psalm into the hand of Asaph."

—I CHRON. xvi. 7.



SHALL use this text illustratively, rather than literally and grammatically. There is a song in the heart of it; we are in quest of that song. The picture is full of colour, the picture is almost alive. Let us regard the incident as typical and ideal.

Every age has had its David, its man great in song, its poet who saw the upper and brighter side of things; all the ages have been indebted to the musician, the poet, the man who could find words for our dumbness. Many who cannot write poems can appreciate poetry; the song is not always sung by the composer. You yourselves are little poet-laureates in your own limited but not insignificant way; you have delivered psalms into the hand of Asaph. Did you not compose a little song on the child's first birthday? With difficulty you got it into some kind of rough rhyme, but there was a poetic soul in all the crudeness; the composition was difficult to scan, but those who read it with the heart saw tears in it and laughter and religious meaning, and the family crowned you with worthy bay as the laureate of the house. You also wrote something on the child's wedding day, you delivered a psalm to some local Asaph and he sang it for you, or ran it through the harp and made double music of it; you thought the poem good, and those who knew you read it through your eyes, and thanked God for the sweetness and the melody of the nuptial song. You also wrote again when the harvest was a heap, and the field a desolation, and the trees were stormstruck; then you tried to be in your own way members of the family of Habakkuk who sang when there were no figs. The

point, therefore, is that we are all poets in design, in instinct, in possibility, in high desire ; if we wear our singing robes in private, and take them hastily off when the footfall is on the front step, lest we should be caught in that new priesthood, it is of no consequence ; the great moral fact remains that sunshine means music, and that extremes meet in the fact that even midnight has its own psalms.

In very truth there is a special psalm for every day in the week. We should expect the psalm as confidently as we expect the dawn. But who looks out for David with his psalms, for Asaph with his harp and his attendant choir ? Yet there they are, and they are often wasted upon us, and we say it is very oppressive, melancholy, and ghostily silent. If we only knew, the air is alive with music, but we do not hear it, our ears are waxed heavy that they should not hear, and the festival proceeds every day unseen, unheard, an anonymous and neglected providence. The psalm for the day would suit no other day quite so well. Unless, therefore, we sing the psalm on the very day for which it was intended, it will drop into prose, it will be as a bird with its wings closed when it might have been as an angel flying in the midst of heaven. Do not let us look out for an occasional psalm ; David, using the name typically and ideally, writes a psalm for every day, he writes three hundred and sixty-five psalms in the year ; not one psalm is like another, each psalm has its own note, distinctive, poignant, thrilling ; why these silent days and these dumb times and these psalmless years, when the whole life might be bathed in the river of music and of joy ? A memorable day when David delivers a psalm to Asaph ; there is the meeting of the waters, the meeting of the ages, the meeting of divers gifts and ministries. A David handing a psalm to an Asaph, tell me is there aught in poetry more fire-like, blossom-like, summer-like ? There is poetry in every man, there is fire in every stone, there is a flame in the ice ; what we call cold we should under other circumstances call heat and fire. The psalms are being distributed, where are the Asaphs that stretch out corresponding hands and receive the great gifts of God ? We are prone to turn life into moan and threnody and winter wail ; we find a species of

melancholy joy in being joyless; affectation makes a trade of its own disappointments and dejections; vanity seeks to create a reputation by showing you how it can weep over its own degradation; resist the devil and he will flee from you! Get hold of the psalm, make room for David; he has a right to sit in every house. David does but write the psalm, he puts all the events into a great massive music; he did not create the providence, he can but celebrate it. We all need such Davids, such poets, such idealists; it is delightful to sit at their feet and hear their many-toned voices, and receive from them their manifold utterance, their multifold poetry. Never despise the ministers of literature, of poetry, of song, of religion, of the innermost sanctuary; they may not work with their hands in the ordinary sense of the word, but they make me work with mine, they inspire me, I say I will try again; heard ye that blast of music from the high hills? it meant hope, service, a new birthday, a gate falling back upon the Eden of heaven. Fool is he beyond redemption who eats stones when he might feed on bread!

Take this David as typical and ideal, and this Asaph in the same light, and regard the text as suggesting that there are memorable psalm-days in life; then you will get a great lesson that will go with you through all the week of time and sing you out of your despair.

When the child was born David delivered this psalm to the Asaph of the time:—"Behold, a man child is born into the world; take this child and nurse him for me, and I will give thee thy wages; train up a child in the way he should go; parents, love your children and be not bitter against them; their angels are in heaven; watch them, teach them, feed them, make them strong, live your own life over again in their opening lives." Thus the incoming of the child was the incoming of the psalm; the psalm was waiting, and the moment the cry went up, A man child is born into the world! the psalm followed, or should have followed, or would follow if the house were not the pit which an atheist calls his home. An atheist can have no home; he may have a house, storey on storey high, but without God there is no

home, no inner shrine, no poetry of sanctuary and joy, refuge and heavenly shelter. Call this sentiment, we have proved it to be fact; we could degrade it into sentiment, but we have accepted it as discipline. But the psalm seems to be without rhythm. That is your serious mistake; this is a psalm that runs in parallelisms, this is a music within a music, and if there be not a corresponding music in your soul you never can read it. Many men can read the news but cannot read the poem: there is an expert elocution as well as an expert mechanism. We must remember that some psalms are psalms of history and instruction and example, some psalms are didactic, rather than poetic in the usual sense of the term. There is a sense in which poetry is the true interpreter of history and a sense in which history is a rough poetry; he that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

When the child died David delivered a psalm to Asaph. The poets can write in darkness; the poets do not ask for candle light in which to inscribe their pages with immortal verse. Poets can see in the dark: to God there is no darkness. When the child died David handed this psalm: While the child was yet alive I fasted and wept, for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious unto me, that the child may live? but now that he is dead, wherefore should I fast? I will arise and take sacramental bread, and praise the Lord that the centre of gravity has changed, and that my soul is not here but there. And the psalm ran on into lighter measures: Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven; their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven. And Jesus called unto Him a little child. And the little one became as a thousand, and the absent as the only present; the veil was translucent, nay, transparent, and you saw the child in a new light and folded in an ampler love; you did not miss the psalm, did you? David wrote it, Asaph received it, the choir sang it; ah! sad if all this were lost on you, when it was all meant for you. A day without a psalm, what is that but a day without God?

In the day of battle, hardship, and difficulty David

delivered a psalm unto Asaph : “ Remember His marvellous works that He hath done, His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth ; Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power ; Thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy ; and in the greatness of Thine excellency Thou hast overthrown them that rose up against Thee ; Thou sentest forth Thy wrath which consumed them as stubble ” ; Thou didst not answer the enemy with words, but with bolts of thunder ; Thou didst not chaffer with the foe, Thou sent a wind to talk to him. He has been with me in six troubles, and in seven He will not forsake me ; when the poor and the needy seek water and there is none and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Jacob will not forsake them. When thou passest through the fire I will be with thee, and through the water it shall not overthrow thee. It would seem as if this great psalm came direct from God’s own hand without passing through an intermediary ; this poetry is fresh from heaven, this is a dew which has not alighted on a flower on the way to us, but has fallen immediately on the heart that was athirst for God.

Thus every day has its own psalm, its peculiar and distinctive and non-transferable music. Have we not had psalmless days ? Whose blame ? Our own ; God’s David has never failed, an Asaph has always been at hand, and if we have lost the psalm it is because we have lost our hearing. In the day of penitence and heart-distress on account of the burden and the misery of sin, David, always taking that term in its typical and ideal sense, delivered this psalm : “ Seek ye the Lord while He may be found ; call ye upon Him while He is near ; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thought, and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” And the psalm rolled on into the most evangelical strain of music : “ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” The penitent has a psalm written for his especial benefit, the guilty soul has had music prepared for the expression of its aspiration and its penitential grief. Do not try to make psalms of your

own when great psalms have been prepared for you ; every occasion has been fitted with a biblical psalm. You cannot improve the psalms of the ancient time ; when you are in deepest trouble because of pain or loss or conscious guilt or alarming and pursuing vengeance, go to the Bible stories, and you will find there a psalm as if specially written for you ; and no man has ever been able to paint the lily of the psalms, or to gild the refined gold of God's sanctuary, music, and poetry.

In the day of death and the hour of desolation, when life is a void and the garden is a wilderness, David delivered this psalm to the ages : " We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for defeat was never written on God's rod and God's staff. Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat ; the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them to living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

"There shall no tempest blow,
No scorching noontide heat,
There shall be no more snow,
No weary, wandering feet ;
Then let us lift our eyes
To the hills our fathers trod,
To the summer of the skies,
To the bosom of our God."

Never miss the psalm for the day. To repeat, expect the psalm as surely as you expect the dawn. Sometimes the psalm will come just as the dawn comes ; the dawn comes quietly, silently, growingly, every few minutes the light seems to secure a further conquest upon the darkness and the shadow, and then the brighter morning, and then the zenith flame :

such is the growth of the psalm in the consciousness and in the heart of men.

These are illustrative instances how every day David may deliver the psalm of the day to some waiting Asaph who has the gift of utterance. The great lessons are evident. Faith is not to be dumb. There can be no dumb religion. A speechless religion may be momentarily inevitable; sometimes the heart is too full for speech; in that case we are not chargeable with dumbness, but with over-eloquence; there is a silence that is atheistic, there is a reticence that is criminal; to have seen God's going and felt the balm of His breath in the chill air of life and to have said nothing about it, that is not piety, that is blasphemy. In the second place, no nation is to be excluded from the use of such psalms. "Sing unto the Lord, all the earth; show forth from day to day His salvation, declare His glory among the heathen, His marvellous works among the nations." Let your song awaken other lands. May they who are afar off on the sea be quite sure that somewhere there is singing, there is music, there is a band, somewhere there are crimson banners flying in the far-off clime. What is it? The household of God has received a new blessing and is uttering a new psalm. The desire of the apostolic heart was that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy: "For this cause I will confess to Thee among the Gentiles and sing unto Thy name"; and again it is said, "Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with His people"; and again, "Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles, and laud Him, all ye people"; and Zion did not hear this without joining in the great testimony: "And there shall be a root of Jesse, and He that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in Him shall the Gentiles trust." That comes of your singing; it is missionary singing, it is evangelistic singing, the psalm cannot be confined to your own mouth any more than the fragrance can be confined to the flower: the flower is local, but the fragrance rises, and the odorous incense floats on every wind. When Zion is alive with song the Gentiles shall hear of it; when the Church is warm with devotional music the outside world will begin to wonder what change has taken place in the air and the climate of life. It would seem, therefore, as if the whole responsibility

lay with us ; a louder, sweeter song may mean another conversion, may mean the awakening of Ethiopia and the outstretching of her hands unto God. Sing unto the Lord !

We are never to rest content until our piety becomes music. To so many people theology is only a controversy. They have opinions—those murderers of the soul ! They have views—my lords ! they have views—those slayers of the poetic instinct ; and they say, “ I think, you know ”—I would that this man would give over what he calls thinking and betake himself to prayer and to singing and to music. The Church is divided to-day because she has opened an infinite bazaar for the sale of opinions ; they are all ticketed in plain figures, and if you do not buy my opinions and pay for them on the spot, where can you be going to but to the bottomless pit ? Ah, me ! opinion may be a little impudent sprite, a kind of black missionary from the pit. We are never to be saved by our cleverness, by our intellectual virility and penetration, and by the amount of examination we can pass in hard questions and in incomprehensible polysyllables. Salvation is of grace, not of grammar ; of faith, not of creed ; of trust, a child’s trust, a little clinging child’s faith, that puts its little hugging arms around your neck and covers your controversy with kisses. So would I love my Lord : when I cannot understand the words I would kiss the lips that speak them.

PRAVER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, wilt Thou by Thy Holy Spirit teach us the deepest mystery of sorrow? May we know the spiritual significance of grief and distress and orphanhood; surely behind such darkness there must burn some peculiar star. The Captain of our salvation was made perfect through suffering; if we suffer with Him we shall also reign with Him; if we know the fellowship of His sufferings we shall also know the power of His Resurrection. We come to the great Cross; against it we lean our own little cross for support, and in the hope that explanation will come from the great suffering to the smaller grief. We rejoice that Jesus Christ has sanctified suffering and sorrow and orphanhood! He did build His Holy Tabernacle on all hills and in all valleys, so that we can now say, The Tabernacle of God is with men upon the earth; the tabernacle of the suffering of Christ is a refuge for all broken hearts. Whilst we were yet sinners Christ died for us; He died for the ungodly, He was delivered up for our offences, and raised again for our justification; may we enter into these spiritual mysteries, and may the heart find nutrition in them, the true food of the soul, of which if a man eat he shall surely be satisfied and truly he shall never die. We rejoice that in dying Christ abolished death; when He was overthrown of the enemy He was victorious; so now we have no more fear or bondage or sense of servility in the presence of death; we say in the spirit of the Cross and by the power of the Resurrection, O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory? This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith; if Thou wouldst increase our faith we should be strong in the presence of the last enemy, that enemy should become as our friend. We look upon all the graves that are dug in the earth, and we see in each the root of a beautiful flower, if so be our friends have died in the love of Christ; we believe in the resurrection of the dead, we believe our friends shall come up in a spiritual body and stand in a house from heaven over which death shall have no more power, and that they shall remember their sorrow and their suffering and their dying no more for ever. Grant unto us all the comforts of the Christian faith; we pant for the River of God; the River of God is full of water; oh that we may be satisfied with the fulness of Thine house and with the riches of

Thy table ! To many this is a season of recollected bereavement ; they recall the time of loss and sorrow inexpressible, and they would seek in the memory of the Cross the alleviation of their own sadness. O Thou who dost love the world and daily save it, by the power of the Cross heal our broken hearts and restore our places in the song of love ! Amen.

XIII.

THIS SAME JESUS.

PREACHED ON GOOD FRIDAY MORNING, MARCH 31ST, 1899.

"This same Jesus."—ACTS i. 11.



HERE is something in identity, there is something in resemblance, there is also something in clever simulation, but there is in identity that which can be found nowhere else. The little child speaks of this or that being "my own," "my very own"; children are struggling after an exact form of definition and expression, and they get it in their own way and in a music peculiarly their own. There is something in the body; God doth give it a body, butterfly and worm and seraph, man and the whole company of heaven. But what is body? The body of dust cannot live long; the thievish years steal it, burglarious time steals the diamonds of the years. There is a spiritual body, there is a body of the cellular tissue within our own body, a kind of phantom body, so that, after everything has been cut away that the surgeon's knife can pierce, there still remains that marvellous physical cellular ghost. It is like the ether which makes wireless telegraphy possible, that all-surrounding, all-involving, all-penetrating ether that lives within the flakes of the diamond and within the solidity of the planets. There is beyond all these forms of expression a spiritual personality, the very personality that has been amongst us all the time, only

we have not seen it, for eyes of flesh can only see bodies of flesh. We are not to understand, therefore, by "this same Jesus" the visible body, the body of flesh and bones just as we knew it when He tabernacled amongst us, breaking our bread and healing our sorrows; yet we can have no doubt as to His identity; we say, This is the same, we know the voice, we know the touch, we know the very shadow that it throws like a blessing on the ground, and yet how changed! Still, it is the same Jesus. What do we wish to be the same? The soul, the love, the sympathy, the tenderness, the all-enlightening wisdom, the all-delivering power. We must correct our notions and definitions of the word "same"; do not let God suffer through our narrowness; do not impose limits of our own and call that definition of magnitude the only house of God.

How edifying to bring together the whole spectacle of the Crucifixion, the birth, the resurrection, the Cross in the middle. We shall miss much of the spiritual music and spiritual figure if we think of the birth as a solitary event, and the Crucifixion as a solitary event, and the resurrection as an event by itself; we shall gain stimulus and edification if we think of the three events as a most pathetic and tragic series of occurrences. How wonderfully alike they are, especially the birth and the resurrection! With the birth and with the resurrection there was associated a grand angelic ministry. There are events which interest all the worlds. We speak of family events, and town events, and national events, in which the great world feels absolutely no concern, oftentimes they do not know next door what is happening within the four walls of your own home. But here is an event which excites the interest of the total universe. At the nativity angels were found singing, but distant; the voice came from afar, the music climbed up the mountains of cloud and fell upon the other side upon the listening earth; there is no doubt about the music; we can hear the voices, we can hear the words, but the singing ones seem to be in the gallery of the air. But there is no mistake about the accent and the roll of the music and the roar of triumph; it is a very gospel that is being sung; I hear the words glory,

God, goodwill, peace, men. Did you not hear all these words? But the singers are invisible to most of us; they are away making the air alive, the whole heaven is trembling into a great song. At the resurrection the angels did not sing, they looked, they stood face to face with mankind; not a hymn was heard. And yet what is a hymn? Who can define music? and who shall extrude from music spoken words? There is a speech that is musical, there is an eloquence that is tuneful, and who knows into what cadence the heavenly voices fell as the angels said, "Fear not"? We can say these words without realising their meaning or music. "He is not here, He is risen": who knows with what penetrating accent, with what high and piercing inflection, that word "risen" was uttered by angelic lips? Let us take care that we do not read the music out of the text; always find music in the Word of God. No man has heard the last little song that the last little daisy can sing. There is more to be heard, and more; we must put our soul's fire into angels' words when we quote that sublime eloquence.

Putting the two angelic ministries together, the singing angels and the speaking angels, we get two great facts, that the Gospel is music, and that it is doctrine. The time will come when doctrine and music will be the same thing; they have been long divorced; it is not the blame of the musician, it may be the blame, even the black guilt, of the unlearned theologians; they may have made dogma or doctrine stiff, austere, a thing of cast-iron, inflexible, unyielding, unbending. That is not theology, that is blacksmithery, some kind of intellectual and partially insane founding of iron and of brass. The time will surely come when the great doctrines shall be at least the recitative of a grand chorale presently to be shouted and sung with ebullience of soul and triumph of spirit; then we shall know that doctrine is not hardness, but tenderness, is not severity, but a basis on which reason can build and on which faith can sing. Notice the angelic ministry, therefore, in both cases, for both events were announced by angels. "Glory to God in the highest!" sang the angel band; "He is not here, He is risen!" sang the angel apostles; see the place

where the Lord lay, the very tomb, the forsaken rock. Who knows what part the angels take in the ministry of grace in our own day? Are the angels empowered by God to stimulate the mind of man and to make that mind abound in true reason, philosophy and gospel, perception and love? Where do the ideas come from? Who are the letter-carriers of heaven who bring the ideas, thoughts, impulses, enthusiasms, which make a great religious service the grandest function possible to the mind and the heart of man? Who are we that we should by some broom of our own making sweep the shore-line clear of the angels and live within the boundary of our own sand and pebble shore? Why not throw open the windows and invite the breezes and hail the coming sunlight, and look out for the angels? There are no angels to the blind heart; there are no flowers to the blind eyes: the blind must not rule us; we must follow the seeing ones, not the blind ones.

At the birth of Jesus Christ people came to Him in little numbers, and numbers larger, and then in swelling throngs. The world had then one centre, and to that centre the world repaired. It was different at the resurrection. At the birth the people came to Jesus; at the resurrection Jesus came to the people. He would not go away until He had seen the people for whom He died; He halted about for them, He stood in accessible places, He put Himself in the way of pilgrimage and inquiry; He asked people what they were weeping about; He said to one group, "Hail!" and they knew the lifted hand, there was none like it, and they stopped as men might stop who expected a vision from heaven.

Here we have a strong and most beautiful and suggestive contrast. In all the religions of the world man is seeking God; in the religion of Christ God is seeking man: a complete definition, a most pictorial contrast. Paganism cries out for God, known or unknown, stone or tree or shining star; in the Christian Gospel God is always seeking man. God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth; the Father seeketh such to worship Him. It is not enough that we should be seeking God; un-

doubtedly that is a point to begin with, and undoubtedly it is a real and pregnant point; no Paganism ought to be ruthlessly or wantonly despised; the idol ought not to be taken from the arms of the idolater until you have something better to put within that hug; but the Gospel notion is that all men have gone astray and God has come after them that He may recover them from their sin; God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Paganism comes down; the Gospel extends and ascends and conquers because it is full of love. A doctrine that has no tears in it will never save the world. You have got up many rival institutions, you have been most ingeniously inventive in endeavouring to supplant the Gospel and displace the Gospel, and you have read essays and invented theories and manufactured socialisms and opened halls, and endeavoured in every way to put down the Gospel, but there are no tears in your philosophies; your philosophies are clever guesses, happy conjectures, brilliant speculations, but so limited that you can congratulate one another upon them, and whenever opinions meet for the purpose of admiring one another, depend upon it the outside world gets no benefit from the infertile interview. It is because the Gospel is love that it makes its way; it is because the preacher of Christ's Gospel has a message to broken hearts and shattered fortunes and dead trusts that the little hut-like chapel or church on the hillside will have a greater effect upon the generation than the proudest building that has in it no altar and no cross.

The difference, furthermore, between the birth and the resurrection may be found in the fact that the birth was a promise, the resurrection was a command. Something had been done, from Bethlehem a great process was about to start; how it would end was more or less matter of speculation, wonder, conjecture, but when Jesus Christ came back again from the dead He said, "All power is given to Me in heaven and in earth." What, then, dear Lord? what wilt Thou make of all power? wilt Thou smite Pilate blind? wilt Thou send paralysis upon the mob that hanged Thee? Hear the answer:—"Go ye, therefore, and teach all

nations." The resurrection thus became a command, the final sign, the Serbal that lifted itself up to the great clouds from the top of which all-conquering sorrow proclaimed the gospel of all-redeeming love. It is a marvellous consummation! The Incarnation a problem, the Resurrection a solution, and the solution was worthy, worthy of the occasion. It established its own worthiness in an ideal way; its poetry is good; if there be nothing in it but poetry, the man who invented it was a poet sevenfold and the king of poets. The Gospel has a grand defence of its own idealism. There are those who would reduce the Christian doctrine or the Christian Gospel into ideal conception and ideal prefiguration of the issue and destiny of things; so let it be for one moment; the ideal may have a mighty influence upon the soul; if we idealise the resurrection it leaves the resurrection still the grandest thing in history. This faith first buried its Man, and then brought Him back again; say it was ideal; poetry is not madness in any criminal sense of insanity. Come to the Gospel for great ideas, grand conceptions, thrilling suggestions as to possibility and issue. We believe in the resurrection as a fact, simple, literal, indisputable, but if any man shall arise amongst us and see only the ideal aspect of the incarnation and of the resurrection, he is not to be despised; some men see all things in limelight; some men see more the atmosphere than the luminousness of it. But come into the Christian Church of every name and kind if you would hear a true account of the birth and resurrection of Christ. We believe them to be literal, historical, factual, but I would always make room for any teacher of whose sincerity there is no doubt when he says, I will show you the poetic ideal and dream side of this great Bethlehem and Calvary.

Between the birth and the resurrection there was the crucifixion, and we cannot have the Sunday until we have had the Friday; we cannot leap over certain time, calling it darkness, and expressing our disgust or our abomination of the horrible tragedy; we must go through it point by point; if we could earnestly sustain the three hours' observance of the divinely human agony, it would be a grand sacramental service;

flesh and blood, however, are weak, we cannot keep up these poor trembling faculties at the proper attention long enough to enter into the whole mystery of the tragedy of the Divine sorrow ; we can, however, recognise it ; there was a Friday, there was a smitten Christ, there was a heavy cross, there was an awful Golgotha. And if a poet did it I will praise the genius by which he was inspired when he made the sun sink in darkness and the earth heave with sorrow ; if this were a painter's work, he was the painter of painters, he was the very apotheosis of genius and art. We believe in the literary and historical outline and framework of the whole occasion, but we are willing to accept the interpretative power of beauty and music and art in order to make Gethsemane and Golgotha more vivid to our suppliant imagination. Many men would willingly enter Christianity at the bright side ; many persons would be perfectly willing to come to the risen Christ. This cannot be done ; still the word sounds along the air of the ages, If any man would follow Me, let him take up his cross, let him take up his cross daily, let him take up *his* cross, not some other man's cross, let *him* do the thing which he least likes to do ; let him slay his son, his only son, his only son Isaac, his only son Isaac whom he loves. Was ever sacrifice described with an iron pen so hard and so terrific and so vivid in its caligraphy ? Yet this is Christianity. We rejoice at Bethlehem, we are glad at the garden tomb vacated by the triumphant Lord, but what about the intervening day ? Have we been crucified with Christ ? If we have not been crucified with Christ we can never rise with Him, it is crucifixion that must precede resurrection. It is not enough for me to sing about my Lord's sorrow, I must enter into it, and in my degree feel what He felt. Christianity is first an agony, then an anthem and an immortality.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we thank Thee for Thy Son Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray, in whose blood we trust. We rejoice in the day that we first saw Thy Son in the holy Book ; we found Him at the beginning of things, yea, and before the beginning, for He was before all things, and by Him all things consist. Now we read Thy book in light, in the full light of noonday ; it is a book of glory, a book of revelation and of high vision and of ineffable music ; Thou hast given unto us the key of the book, now we can open it, and Thou dost open our understanding that we may understand the Scripture, and we have high festival together, the soul living upon the honey of Thy Word, the heart drinking of the river of Thy grace. Enable us to see that Thy book spreads over all the times, comes through all the centuries, giving them light and colour and music and unity ; may we stand fast in Christ Jesus, may we be one in Him ; then schism will be impossible, for we shall be as branches living in the living Vine. We bless Thee for a written word, and for a word within the word which abides when all environments change and pass away, forms expire in their own transiency and inadequacy. We bless Thee for the abiding Gospel, the abiding Paraclete, the eternal Interpreter ; may He dwell with us so that Thy book may never end, but end only to begin again in a new morning, dawning with new tenderness and hope. If any man's heart be sore, if there be a wound right through the middle of it, is there no balm in Gilead ? is there not a Physician there ? If any soul be wrapped in gloom, may he ask who made the stars, that the same Creator may create a planet that shall shine through his own misery. Let the Lord hear the sighing and the crying of the hearts of men ; for the world is full of sorrow and the air is hot with agony. Amen.

XIV.

FAITH SELF-ENLARGING.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, APRIL 13TH, 1899.

"Had ye believed Moses ye would have believed me."—JOHN v. 46.



Do not believe me, therefore you do not believe Moses, say what you like. Every man supplies a true test of his own faith. Moses wrote of me: you may read your own literature without believing it, you may read your own Bible without understanding it. Faith always modernises itself, brings itself up to date, catches the last vision, and the last phase of the Divine movement. Faith is not final; faith is a beginning, a dawn, a spring with infinite summers in its soul. Had ye believed Moses, as ye say ye do, you would have been followers of mine, you would have advanced with the evolution of time and with the progressiveness of the Divine revelation; ye do not believe in your own idol, you cannot believe in your own Bible; you have a creed to which you can only do discredit. Do not believe in a stone, believe in a root; the stone is the same from day to day, without progressiveness, without vitality, without any special identity of a moral and spiritual kind; believe in the root that has in it spring and summer and ruddy autumn, and that sleeps through the winter in hope of the resurrection. Jesus Christ was the most modern of men, Christianity is the most modern of faiths; that only is truly ancient which is truly modern, and that only is truly modern which is truly ancient. The daisy is a little child of yesterday, just peeping over the cradle of the grass, but the duration out of which it came stretches back to the first breathing of God.

A man does not believe his own creed until he is prepared to add to it. The creed must be of the quality of the man. Man is always adding to himself. Man changes, creed changes, but changes by enlarge-

ment, evolution, ever-increasing light and adequacy and tenderness; it does not change eccentrically or capriciously, but it moves in a great sequence of expansion, a movement towards the throne. Be progressive, therefore, and do not you imagine or represent that the creed or the statement of the creed is final. Men might have rested in Moses; there was a point of rest even in that great legislator, you could not add a to-morrow to his to-day, the to-morrow must come along the track of the gloom of the night, and must set itself in the eastern sky according to the decree of an unchangeable progress: but the change does come. The days are lengthening, we say; to one another we often exclaim, The days are lengthening! And so it should be with the day of the soul, with the greater day that shines with a light above the brightness of the sun. The days are lengthening, there is more sky to be seen, the clouds are higher, the stars are longer in coming out because the sun abides. So shall it be when we seize the right idea of the evolution of revelation and providence and destiny, and all through the ever-throbbing, pulsing eternities we shall say to one another, The days are lengthening, with a new meaning and an infinitely deeper pathos. The point to be specially set before the mind is this, that if we believe one thing we are bound to believe another, if that other is of the quality of the first thing, because all first things which are true things have in them other centuries and other revelations. It would be vain for a man to say he believes in the first century if he does not believe in the nineteenth; in the degree in which his faith in the first century is intelligent, his faith in the nineteenth century is logical and necessary. All the great truths of revelation hang together and depend upon one another and return upon one another and accumulate one another into cogent and convincing proof. If we dwell upon this thought a moment it may stimulate and refresh our souls.

Had ye believed in Sin you would have believed in the Atonement. A man's heterodoxy does not begin at the atonement, the heterodoxy began with a false conception of the sin. No man can be a theologian who has not been burned with a sense of guilt,

reddened with blushes of inexpressible shame, torn to pieces in his very soul by self-accusation and self-torment. If we suppose that the atonement is a mere idea or theory or suggestion to which a man may come along an intellectual line and say that he has thought about it and considered it, and upon the whole he has come to certain conclusions upon it—away! That man cannot speak the word atonement, much less explain it or form an opinion about it; it is not along such lines that men reach the agony of the Cross. Only he can hear a Gospel sermon who is in a broken-hearted condition before the Cross. Has it come to this, that men are to shut up book after book of an intellectual kind and then take up the inspired volume of God, and peruse it as if it were one of a series, and say, with cold intellectualism, After having looked at the doctrine of the atonement, the conclusion come to is this, that it was quite an exaggeration of moral feeling and quite an eccentricity in spiritual movement. Shall any man who talks such ineffable blather get into a Christian pulpit and open the Christian Scriptures and attempt to preach a Christian sermon? He cannot do it; he must have been broken-hearted, crushed into penitence, melted into tears, tears reddened into blood, and then he must have said in his great night of agony, My Lord, my God! thou five-wounded Man, pity me and save me! He who passes through that experience will one day preach, it may be in some rude way, but there will be fire in every tone, and there will be a look of God in every expression of the illuminated countenance.

The point to be kept steadily in mind is this, that one belief necessitates another, that faith grows towards more faith in the degree in which it is originally true, intelligent, and sincerely held. We are not holding a cold white cinder out of which all the fire has gone, but we are entrusted with a living coal from the living altar, a great self-evidencing fact and movement in experience and in history. We shall not get right upon these doctrinal matters until we set them in their proper evolution and sequence. It is not proposed that a man shall have handed to him a grand disquisition upon the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, he must be

invited to look first of all into his own heart, he must be impressed with a proper sense of sin, there must be wrought in him a conviction that he is self-helpless in this matter of redemption; when he has been brought down to the lowest point of spiritual depression and hopelessness, then some Philip may mount his chariot and preach to him of Christ and the Five Wounds and the great Cross and the awful agony and the completed Sacrifice, completed once for all; and when the man hears these things in the valley of his sorrow and in the darkness of his despair he may say, My Lord and my God! and he may be converted suddenly, for the Lord shall suddenly come to His temple, and He suddenly comes to many a soul in the gloom of despair.

You see, therefore, that I would drive away the men who want to make an intellectual puzzle of my Lord's sufferings. I have no teaching for people who look upon the atonement of Christ as one of the enigmas of intellectual life, and who wish to treat it as a riddle and to find an answer to its suggestions. I must begin with the sinner; the Holy Spirit will convince the world of sin. When you have got rid of a proper conception of sin, a proper conception of the atonement is impossible; they go together, they must not be disjoined.

Had ye believed in agnosticism ye would have believed in God, and had ye believed in God ye would have believed in agnosticism. Is not that paradoxical? Far from it; it is by keeping close company with Jesus Christ that we begin to know that God is unknowable, that He has kept some things wholly to Himself, that there is no searching of His understanding, and that He can only be knowable by condescension and by revelation. God is unknowable, but God has the power to make Himself known in the degree in which our capacity can receive Him. There is a foolish, superficial, unnameable agnosticism that makes God not only unknowable, but self-unrevealable, takes away from Him the power of revealing Himself, shuts Himself up, if indeed He be in existence at all, in eternal silence, a lifeless God, with less power of revelation than a dog has. You will not believe in that agnosticism, you will accept

the agnosticism of the Bible, which says, No man hath seen God at any time, neither can any man see Him; God is great, and we know Him not; there is no searching of His understanding; it is impossible to look upon God, and live. That is right; and if ye believed in agnosticism you would believe in God, you would rejoice in the unknowable, you would thank God that the sky is too high to be made use of by your all-spoiling fingers. Blessed be God, we cannot spoil the blue sky! Whatever we touch we degrade; if we pluck a flower we kill it. I thank God there are sanctuaries I cannot yet enter, I am not yet old enough, I have not undergone sorrow enough to meeten me by the grace of God for such high temple service and association. But because I have not yet entered into these sanctuaries does it therefore follow that I never may enter into them? My soul hopes to be older, hopes to be more expert and prevalent in prayer, hopes to enter into the mystery of the Cross in a deeper, nobler sense, and my soul has the secret hope that one day a door will open in the infinite blue, and falling silently back on its invisible hinges, I shall be admitted to throw in my poor note with the infinite anthem of the gathered and indissoluble Church. I believe God, therefore I believe that He is unknowable; I believe God, and therefore I believe that He can condescend to reveal Himself; I believe that I cannot now see God, but I know that I can feel Him.

Had ye believed in Evolution ye would have believed in Heaven. You do not believe in heaven, therefore you do not believe in evolution. You have created a miserable kind of evolution of your own, but the true evolution, which means origin, shape, meaning, suggestion, symbolism, progressiveness, accumulation, expansion, must go on multiplying its own words until it gasps, Heaven! There it stops, but stops only to begin. It is not for men to fashion little cutlery of their own in some spiritual or ecclesiastical Sheffield, and to go about cutting the tapes and ligaments of Divine Providence and make them a museum where God made a universe. It is very easy for us to be toy-makers, but children such as we are ought not to be trusted with edged

instruments. It is not for us to be cutting the ligatures, the marvellous nervous system which unites beginnings and ends, ends and beginnings, zeniths and nadirs, points separated by diameters for whose expression there is no arithmetic; we shall be wise only in the degree in which we recognise unity, sequence, purpose, an end, an eschatology that shall vindicate itself by its completeness and its triumphant anthem. Young souls should be particularly careful how they give their unsuspecting confidence to men who with scissors of their own making are going about cutting things into sections and fragments, and leaving them there without connection and without interpretation. I believe God, therefore I believe in progression, in the accumulation of time into at least a symbol of eternity, and into such a development and sanctification of man as at least to suggest the possibility of a personal God and Father.

Keep steadily in mind what the purpose of this meditation is, namely, to show that a right belief at the beginning compels a man to add to that belief everything that is kindred and cognate to its own quality and its own purpose. Thus the great religion of the Bible takes into itself by an absorption vindicated by fact and by spiritual righteousness all that is true, beautiful, musical, benevolent, philanthropic; it will not allow one daisy to fall out of its lap, and it has accommodation enough for the planets. Know that your first faith is right, because you are growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. If you have a faith that will not let you grow, that limits and narrows and belittles you, part with it, get rid of it; why should you break your teeth with gravel stones or seek honey in the heart of the flint? He who believes Moses must believe Christ; he who believes Christ must believe Moses. There is now a kind of action which I cannot properly designate by any word that occurs to me at the moment, and if the word did occur I should suspend its use because of its possible cruelty, but the idea looks in the direction which can sever the Testaments and keep one Testament apart from another, as if they had no relation. If Christians mutilate the Bible, how great is that cruelty! I can give a personal testimony

only, and therefore I must preach still out of the Old Testament, I must keep company with Moses and Elias, and the great singers of Israel, and the mighty prophets who wore their singing robes, and from high heights in the cloud saw how the ages were passing through a grand evolution that would end so far as this dispensation is concerned in a song, a shout of victory and honour to the slain Lamb. I can understand the New Testament only after I have perused the Old. God has also given me permission to take the lamp backwards, the New Testament lamp, and to read the first chapter of Genesis with the lamp-light of the last chapter in the Apocalypse. If ye believed the Old Testament ye would believe the New, for it wrote of the New, it promised the New; it laid down its pen at the close of every page and said, Wait; to-morrow we may see the sunrise. If ye believed the New Testament you would believe the Old, for the New Testament says, I came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil the law, I came not to multiply sacrifices, but to show the meaning of all the sacrifices that had been shed and offered through the ages. If ye believed in one verse in the Bible you would believe the whole Bible. The Bible can condense itself into a verse; a verse can extend itself into a Bible.

If ye believed in one little grassblade you would believe God. The grassblade means the total creation. Not a little violet peeps out of its hedge hiding-place that did not require the whole action of our solar system to give it growth, opportunity of expansion and final expression. These little daisy lights are not sparks of our kindling. All the little things mean all the great things, and there is no truly great thing that despises any really true little thing. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones, for I say to you that daisy and insect and all things living mean, when properly interpreted, God. I will not have it that a man can come in with some grand intellectual excitement of his own and sit down in judgment in great pomp and circumstance, and give it as his opinion whether there is a God. Let him start at the right point, let him begin with the dust, let him find the ages in

the chalk, in the sand, let him see eternity in geology, the beginning of the idea of the interminable and the unbeginning and the whole mystery of duration with its infinite interplay and enigmas to which there are no known answers. Do not suppose that any man's unfaith begins a long way from the point at which he believed. If he has unfaith he never had any faith, and he must be told so, and he must not go into the eternal darkness with a lie on his lips. He that does not believe in Christ never believed in God. He who does not believe in the Divine origin of a grassblade does not believe in the creation of the heavens and the earth. All things hang together; by Him, that is by Christ, saith the apostle in his most ardent rhetoric, in Him all things consist, live together, are welded together, are a living ganglion of infinite suggestions and possibilities.

The Church, therefore, is to me the largest of all institutions; the Bible is, therefore, to me the completest of all books; it is not one book, it is many books in one. Sometimes a great Bible-reader is sneeringly described as a man of one book. There is no one book called the Bible; the Bible is all books, the Bible is the library, the Bible is the root out of which all other literature that is true, wise, beautiful, and poetical came. Do not, therefore, cynically describe a Bible-reader as a man of one book. The Bible is all true books in one.

Have we faith? The Spirit of faith longs for more worlds for faith to conquer. Lord, increase our faith; give us vision after vision of Thy loveliness and Thy majesty, and give these visions to us, not in response to our vanity, intellectual or moral, but in response to an earnest desire to know somewhat more of the vastness of Thy kingdom, and the beneficence of Thine empire. Jesus Christ had no finality; Jesus Christ never said, There is no more to believe; Jesus Christ always said, on the contrary, Keep on believing, expecting, praying, and vehemently desiring to see more sky and to feel more of the inward warmth and the ineffable comfort of the Paraclete whom I will send to you. Did Jesus Christ ever say, That is all, nothing more can be said, and nothing

more can be revealed to you ; you have heard the very last word respecting the kingdom of heaven ; having spoken that word I give you adieu and melt into the impenetrable clouds ? Never ! What did the dear Lord say when He was about to go ? He said, Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid ; in My Father's house are many mansions ; if it were not so I would have told you ; I go that I may send another Comforter, who shall abide with you for ever ; He will lead you into all truth ; He will not speak of Himself, whatsoever He hears that shall He speak ; He will take of the things that are Mine and show them to you, and you will rise in reverent wonder because the acorn contains a forest and a handful of corn will shake like Lebanon ; await the baptism of this great power ; await the Divine Paraclete ; keep together, and the Lord will suddenly come to His temple.

When the day of Pentecost was fully come they were all with one accord in one place, when suddenly there came from heaven the sound as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the place where they were together, and fire was seen and cloven tongues of fire, and a new gift was added to the resources of the Church. There the mystery began, and it has continued until now, and the Lord's Pentecost will continue until the last vision shall be seen. We forget that we are under the dispensation of the Spirit ; we are not now under the dispensation of the visible Christ ; yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet henceforth know we Him no more after the flesh. But He has given us His Spirit, therefore it is still Himself who abides in the Church and rules in the Church and inspires the Church, and if ever you hear true reasoning, high eloquence, tender pleading, pathos that comes out of the heart, inconceivable in depth and intensity of feeling, know that you have been under the power of the Holy Ghost. God will raise up more men, the ministry of the Spirit will be continued ; it is not for me to say who should do this or who should do that ; the whole universe is under the dominion and inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and He will see to it that the travail of Jesus Christ's soul shall have compensation, and as for the enemy, He will cast him as a stone into the depth of the sea.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we have known Thee by Thy gentleness, Thy condescension, Thy tears ; we have said again and again, Thy gentleness hath made me great. This is the testimony of Thy Church from age to age ; we live in mercy ; because Thy compassions fail not, therefore are we now before Thee, praying with our whole heart in the name of the Saviour of the world. Thou dost lead the blind by a way that they know not ; when my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up, is the cry of the world's bitter orphanage. Thou dost lead us and guide us though we know it not, Thou art round about us like an atmosphere of love ; the Lord is our strong tower to which we may continually resort ; we will abide under the shadow of Thy wings ; there is no fear in the tabernacle of God. Lead us away, we humbly pray Thee at the Cross, from all mean refuges and false sanctuaries, and establish our feet in the tower of Zion and in the sanctuary of Thine Almightyness. Behold, our days are in Thine hand ; they are so few that we ourselves can count them, yet so uncertain that we know not when they may terminate ; thus Thou dost train the world by certainty and uncertainty, by rocks and by clouds, by shadows full of ghostliness and by events that cannot come within the sphere of calculation. May we never despise the ghostly element in life, may we look up for the spiritual presence, for the spiritual monition, for the suggestion which comes down with our common ideas, but from no common source ; thus may we be alive to every movement of Thy providence ; may we wait for Thee, and listen eagerly, and lovingly expect Thee, and be quite sure that Thou wilt be near before the dawn arises. We thank Thee for all Thy love ; where shall we begin and where shall we end ? for Thy love, like Thyself, is from the beginning ; we are redeemed from eternity, we are foreseen from the temple of the invisible, every step we take is under the scrutiny of Thine eye. We believe that our life is portioned out to us, that the very hairs of our head are all counted, and we stand in the delicacy of Thy providence, blest, secure, and full of hope. If we cannot now thank Thee for all Thy fire, Thy trials, and Thy sore judgments, Thou knowest our frame, Thou rememberest that we are dust ; Thou wilt not be cruel with us, Thou wilt not overbear us by Thy great strength. O Thou Shepherd of the universe, Thou dost carry the lambs in Thy bosom. We have come with our various tributes, psalm and flower and tears of love and utter-

ances of penitence ; we have all come that we may stand confidently and lovingly before God and receive at the Lord's hands of the Lord's mercies. We bless Thee that we have escaped hard-heartedness, we have tears still left in the deep fountain of pity and of penitence ; we thank Thee that our eyes are not fires, they are fountains of tears, pools of sacred water ; behold, we answer the providence of God with a discipline that would be obedient, noble, and even heroic. Thou knowest our strength how frail it is, and our days how quickly they run out and are forgotten, and Thou knowest all the training Thou hast designed for us ; in the degree in which we can see it to be Thy training we are happy in pain and triumphant in defeat. We bless Thee for all Thy love, especially for Thy great love in Jesus Christ, from whom or to whom all blessings flow. He is our Saviour, and we need no other ; He is mighty to save ; we are not called upon to eke out Thine omnipotence by our weakness, it is all of God, it is all of the Cross, it is all of eternal love, therefore shall we not fret and vex our souls with sore disquietude, but we would now at the Cross and in the name of its atoning blood cast ourselves upon the infinite strength of God. Amen.

XV.

FORTY DAYS.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 16TH, 1899.

"Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights."—EXODUS xxiv. 18.

“ORTY DAYS”—that would be only half the text. We do not measure time rightly ; we sleep off so much that we forget it. Solitude knows nothing about forty days ; it despises that statement of time. What is the poetry of which solitude tearfully avails itself ? “Forty days and forty nights.” There is no rest to pain. We say flippantly, How long is it since the event occurred ? Then we answer roughly, It must be forty days. To us in our excitement and frivolity and vain self-enjoyment it may have been just forty days, but to the sufferer

himself how long was it? "Forty days and forty nights": the nights count in the calendar of solicitude. We are too rough in our estimates and statements of time; we lump the days and name them in general numbers; to the sufferer every moment is a day and every succeeding moment a night. The blood trickles off drop by drop; if there could be one great slashing stroke of the sword, and the life could be cut in twain at one movement of the arm, it would be nothing; it is the shedding of blood moment by moment, the never-ceasing pain, the ever-flowing flood of grief. These things cannot be driven into men by preacher or lecturer or author; some things can only be learned by doing them. Experience is not a lesson for a guinea down, a poor little thing you can pay for; it is a sacrifice which spurns arithmetic. If the forty days and forty nights' experience of the great saints and prophets had been referred to in one sentence only, it would have been a great sentence, but that period is so often referred to, and under such varied circumstances, that the accumulation of the occurrences itself constitutes an argument and opens up a great temple of revelation and vision into which we may go with uncovered heads, with strained eyes and expectant ears; as if surely the Lord has something to say about this use of the number forty. It is variously made up; it is a most mystical, not to say magical number. With the mystery and the magic we have nothing now to do; there are certain great spiritual instances which it is well worth while to recall and revive, and one special instance in which we do well to bow down as if uncovering before an altar partly of gold, partly of precious stones, partly of light and the very splendour of heaven.

Moses was forty days and forty nights in the mount. He was away. The mount means high elevation, an altitude crowned with golden clouds, utmost distance, perspective, and all the music of mystery. Sometimes we can only say of the great man, legislator, poet, or prophet, He is not here. Where is he? Away. Where? No man can tell; in the hidden places, in the invisible sanctuaries; away among the shaping clouds that are sometimes almost living presences. It is only when we are at some distance from our own

life that we can make anything really of it ; you cannot deeply consider that problem in the throng, you cannot use your slate and pencil in the great city multitude ; you must go away into a mountain or valley or hang over the sanctuary-sea ; in order to see yourself you must stand some distance back from yourself. I should not be surprised to learn, though I trust to my imagining rather than to my history, that the battle is not fought by the men who are shooting one another or sabring one another ; it would not surprise me as a Bible-student to learn that the two meh who are fighting this battle are away yonder on the hillsides in some little tent with sketches and drawings and maps before them, and that these two men are directing the whole fight from their respective standings out yonder, and at a considerable distance from the scene of the bloody fray. We have not yet considered the full religious significance of distance. God is looking on and directing the whole mechanism and living apparatus and arrangement of this universe ; He is not visibly down in the throng, the great surging, sweltering, innumerable throng, but at an altar from which He can see the whole movement, and from which He can direct the whole process. His chariots are in the heavens, they are twenty thousand in number, and thousands of thousands, and as for His fiery horses invisible, whose necks are clothed with the thunder of His own omnipotence, He sends them by night and by day to do His work, whether of slaughter or of carriage or of transport of the saints from the plains of the battle to the heights of the victory.

Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights. What was he receiving ? He was receiving the law. Our greatest men are not the men on the streets. We call these men on the streets very active persons, much too active ; the law is not a street anecdote or an incident of the thoroughfare, the law is away in the sanctuary of the infinite, the invisible, and the ineffable. The city is only too glad when its own lights are put out and the great sunshine kisses it again with its hope and its assurance of another day. We are only thankful for the poor wavering gas-lamp when the sun is not awake. There are many

men who have never gone up into the mount of God for their law; they feed themselves with little mottoes, with narrow apothegms, with neat-looking but most perishable proverbs; the inventors of these terse and shallow sayings are always ready to renounce their responsibility for their own mental offspring. We should want to live, not in the last invention of wit, but in the eternal law and righteousness of God, upon the thing that did not come out of the earth, but that came down to the earth. The tabernacle of God should be with men upon the earth. Watch the men who in some little mud-hut of their own bewildered and intoxicated wit have written out some small schedules for their own guidance; they are drunk, but not with wine, they reel and are as drunken men on the streets which they themselves have defined and paved: watch the men who live in the upper sanctuary, who consult the law and the testimony, who take little trembling, palsied time back into the eternal to be judged and instructed and inspired; you will find such men do not live upon cobwebs of their own spinning, they live upon the immutable righteousness of God.

Moses was away forty days and forty nights receiving, not inventing, the law. There is a wondrous deliberation about the movement of God. The few commandments which we once called the law could be written in less than a minute each; it was not the handwriting but the heart-writing that required the time. It takes a long while to bring the law of God, any law of righteousness and spiritual interpretation, within the grasp of the moral intuition and experience of mankind. God is deliberate, God is in no haste; the Eternal cannot hasten itself, haste is not a word known in the upper speech; it carries in its own heart an excuse, an avowed impotence, an irreligious impatience. Yet what are forty days and forty nights compared with the lifetime obedience which is required to the law given within these points of time? It may take a man's whole life to enable him to spell the first commandment; it may take a lifetime to master the second or any one of the ten commandments; we cannot run through them in a day; obedience is a slow growth of a

struggling life ; once acquired, once consecrated into a habitude of the soul, it is easy and is carried as a burden that is light.

Where is Moses now ? He is away in the mount. What is he doing this time ? Praying. Why is he praying ? Because of the wickedness of Israel ; they had abolished the true worship and set up the worship of the calf. And I fell down before the Lord, as at the first, forty days and forty nights : I did neither eat bread, nor drink water, because of all your sins which ye sinned, in doing wickedly in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. Ye have been a people of a stiff heart and of a rebellious mind ; your record, O Israel, is bad. And at Taberah, and at Massah, and at Kibroth-hattaavah, ye provoked the Lord to wrath. Likewise when the Lord sent you from Kadesh-barnea, saying, Go up and possess the land which I have given you ; then ye rebelled against the commandment of the Lord your God, and ye believed Him not, nor hearkened to His voice. Thus I fell down before the Lord forty days and forty nights, as I fell down at the first ; because the Lord had said He would destroy you. And He said so with good reason. In the first instance Moses was away receiving the law ; in the second instance he was away acting as the priest of the people. And why was not Aaron pleading the case of the people ? Because the priest was the sinner. Do not imagine that office is an eternal qualification, that once a priest, once a minister, once a prophet, you remain in possession of your mantle to the end. You hold your mantle upon character ; when your character has gone your mantle is a rag. He who ought to have been the priest of Israel was down away from the mount of communion and of true priesthood, and it was a layman who officiated as the priest. Why do men not read history ? why do they think that the priesthood consists of a robe, a mantle, a garment of some official type and significance ? The man is the priest, or priesthood is a lie ; it is the living soul that prays for dead souls. When the fire of our consecration has gone out, then bury the prophetic robe, you have despoiled and degraded it. The priest not praying, the priest himself prayed

for, as the meanest of the sinners, and a layman, of a stumbling speech and a halting tongue, called up to play the priest before God! So it shall ever be. There is a law above a law, there is a personality above an office; and what if it so happen at the last that it has been some poor woman-heart that has been praying for us and some poor lay heart that has saved the city from the blaze of an avenging fire? Oh the rottenness of our little schemes, arrangements, and mechanical ordinances! He is the priest of God who has a sound heart, who is grieved because of the unrighteousness of men, and who falls upon his face forty days and forty nights and prays the clemency of God. I prayed therefore unto the Lord, and said, O Lord God, destroy not Thy people and Thine inheritance, which Thou hast redeemed through Thy greatness, which Thou hast brought forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Remember Thy servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; look not unto the stubbornness of this people, nor to their wickedness, nor to their sin. Their sin is very great, shameful, yet they are Thy people and Thine inheritance; they have sinned, but they are still Thine; spare them, pity the poor fools which Thou broughtest out by Thy mighty power and by Thy stretched-out arm: not a recitation, but a prayer; not words, but blood; and God answered with a grand amen.

Then what is this poor creature doing down here? He is tired, he is disappointed, he is overborne; the Lord sent to him a visitor and a helper, who said, Arise and eat, poor sinking one, because thy journey is too great for thee; here is profusion, abide and eat; and Elijah rose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat—how long? Forty days and forty nights. God's sacraments have abiding in them; God's bread is not wasted; no all-devouring diabetes is allowed to swallow and consume the bread which God supplies to the prophet's soul. He rose and went forty days and forty nights in the strength of that meat, and to what goal did he proceed? To Horeb, the mount that was a sanctuary, the sanctuary that was a temple presence. God's meat is always intended to carry us to God's house. It is a shameful thing for a man to eat God's

wheatfield and God's vineyard, and go in the strength of such nourishment and innocent exhilaration to the bed of lust, to the market-place of knavery, to the entertainment that owes all it is to the devil. Never eat God's food and go in the strength of it in a wrong direction ; go towards Horeb and the sanctuary and the place of meeting and of vision, to the altar and to the trysting-place. He wastes good bread who spends the strength of it in serving the devil.

These were old instances, but we can come nearer to our own most sensitive experience. In Matthew iv. 2 we read that Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, "And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He was afterward an hungred." Moses and the Lamb ; the similarities between their histories are worth tracing out ; such collocation of coincidence and repetition constitutes itself into an argument. Forty days and forty nights Jesus was fasting : surely great preparation means great issues ; surely this is an athlete in training for some fight ; this cannot be a mere pedantic arrangement ; we must wait and see what comes of this trial of the soul : it may be that fasting is the true feasting, it may be that this disciplining the body and all that gathering up of force which we call passion or desire may mean that the greatest contest ever fought on the theatre of time is about to take place. Read the history and see if it be not so.

And then in the Acts of the Apostles i. 3 we hear that Jesus was seen of the disciples forty days—forty days of sunshine, forty days of dazzling, blazing light. We see Jesus Christ in a historical aspect ; He has not risen and returned in an ideal, poetical, or exalted sense, He Himself has challenged the disciples to identify Him : See, spirits have not flesh and blood as ye see me have ; when He had thus spoken He showed His hands and His feet. This is the period of testimony, period of revelation, period of the true preaching of the Kingdom of God, and it may be that we require forty days and forty nights, representing an indefinal space of time, in which to prove our own resurrection with the Lord ; it was not Jesus Christ alone, He involved and represented the whole Church which He redeemed with His precious blood, and it

may be that now we are passing through our forty days and forty nights, nights in our case, if not in His, in which to prove that in the daylight and in the night-light, in the blaze of noonday and in the calm of mid-night, we have risen with Christ and are the witnesses of the resurrection.

There are many other instances to which reference need not now be made; they should, however, be collated and looked at in their sequence and unity, because such collation would be an argument and an added light to the glory which already burns upon the whole Christian line of history and of evidence.

What is the meaning of all this withdrawal, of all this forty days and forty nights' experience? The meaning is rest. The prophets must go away for a time, they must become nothing, enter into a state of negativeness, forget for the time being their own office and function; to forget it may be best to remember it. But the withdrawal must not be too long; too much rest would mean weariness; there is a rest that leads to reluctance, disbelief, and despair. A measurable rest, and then a happy renewal of service, that is the Lord's idea of the ministry of His own discipleship.

What is the meaning of this withdrawal for forty days and forty nights? The meaning is self-culture. A man may be too busy keeping other vineyards to keep his own, a man may be so much from his own fireside that his own children shall be turned into atheists by a misconstruction of his false piety. We should not indulge in any culture that separates us from the people. Beware of that fraction of wisdom which shuts you out from the wise and only enables you to despise the ignorant. We find such culture oftentimes in society, a man sufficiently educated to despise one class and not sufficiently instructed to be recognised by another. Where is that man? A man may be wealthy enough to despise poverty, yet not wealthy enough to secure a right place in some other circles of society. The Bible never calls us to a culture that separates us from men. Be sure your culture is only inferior and most partial if it lead you to despise

any creature under heaven. The greater the man the more condescending the soul; the larger the wisdom the tenderer the pity. Beware of that respectability which is self-idolatrous, self-conscious, utterly mean and worthless, and strive earnestly for that noble virtue which can see good in the worst and which can sit down of right with the princes of the Church.

What is the meaning of all this withdrawal? The meaning is reception. There must be a time of intaking, there must be periods when we are not giving out, but when we are receiving in. Sometimes we do everything by doing nothing; we become mere receptacles, receivers, instruments, beneficiaries, vessels to be filled with the Master's grace, and to be crowned with the King's blessing. Sometimes we are doing our best work by sitting down in the green field, watching the blue sea, allowing the winds of heaven to breathe upon us from all quarters, catching the moorland breeze and the sea wind, and hearing voices that have no words by which to articulate their meaning, and which are yet most eloquent and most poetic. Understand therefore that withdrawment from the prophetic office and service, as in the case of Moses and Elijah, does not mean abandonment of that office, but further preparation for it, and that the best withdrawment is a withdrawment which takes us right into the very sanctuary of the soul of Jesus Christ. We must retire with Him, go up the mountain with Him to pray, spend the whole night with Him in intercession; we must do it all in the spirit of His Cross and in the spirit of His purpose. And then let not the enemy rejoice that the worker has gone. The worker has only gone that he may acquire a firmer muscle and deal upon the head of the enemy a deadlier stroke.

PRAAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we thank Thee that the light is greater than the darkness ; the valley will soon be done, and then our feet shall be set upon the highland, we shall breathe the morning of the mountains, and shall be glad once more ; Thou who hast shown us great and terrible grief wilt also show us the face of light and cause us to hear the voice of music, and we shall sit down at the banqueting-table of God because we have been redeemed by the power of the Cross. We rejoice in the morning and in the summer and in young life, and in all things that have had upon them the flush of the dawn. Thou dost set these things amongst us day by day, that we may be called up into higher joy and realise a wider liberty and bow ourselves in a humbler devotion. Some days are full of life, death has no power over them, the evening star itself is but another sun, and all the circling day is but a revolution of Thy love and Thy glory. We bless Thee that we can associate the idea of resurrection with some days ; the grave shall be emptied, and death shall be mocked, and life and immortality, brought to light in the Gospel, shall fill the whole heaven with morning splendour. We bless Thee for all hopeful words, for all trumpet tones that call to service and endurance and high heroism ; we thank Thee that now and again even in the valley we see some peep of the sun ; it is not all darkness, Thou dost prick the gloom with points of light ; Thou art a wondrous God, and Thy providence is an infinite love. Thou wilt not spurn us when we cannot pray ; Thou wilt not misinterpret our grim silence in the sanctuary, because our grief is greater than our song ; Thou rememberest our frame, Thou knowest that we are dust, for Thine own hands did make us, and Thou art great in pity, as Thou art great in power, and because Thy strength faileth not our infirmity shall not be our ruin. We bless Thee for the great thoughts of the Gospel redemption, the great thoughts of pardon, release from sin, its guilt and its burden ; its high ideals, its victory over death, its inauguration in Thy universe of a great place of life, in which place there shall be no more death, neither shall there be any sorrow or crying, neither shall there be any more pain. May the children of pain praise Thee because Thy grace abounds over their suffering. Thou hast set amongst us the ministry of sorrow ; Thou hast in well-nigh every house a church

of grief, a sanctuary of loss and pain ; many a hymn we have heard under the low roofs of that sanctuary : and we have said, It is the Lord, and He is triumphing in the weakness of men, and out of weakness He will bring completed power. God bless the children of suffering, the old men, and the little children, and the patient women, who are preaching Thy Gospel in heroism, in long-endured pain without moaning or complaint ; they shame us by the greatness of their faith : Lord, increase our faith ! If to-day any are in sad grief and mourning because of overwhelming loss and sudden disaster and bitter disappointment, the Lord of the sea comfort the survivors of those who have perished in the deep. The Lord's pity be over us like a great cloud of rain that shall break in showers of tears, and then allow the sun to shine in his cloudless glory. The Lord grant unto all of us the spirit of Eastertide and resurrection and triumph and hope ; and if Thou wilt do these things for us we shall remember the day and call it our birthday. Amen.

XVI.

TWO ENVIRONMENTS.

PREACHED ON EASTER SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 2ND, 1899.

"Jesus met them."—MATT. xxviii. 9.



ESUS had a way of meeting people unexpectedly. He has never abandoned that significant and blessed way. Jesus waylays men ; Jesus watches the travellers, counts their footfalls, observes the whole manifestation of their personality when they are in grief and wonder and tender communication one with another ; and at the right moment, for Jesus keeps all the moments, He joins them, faces them, suddenly encounters them, and asks them delicate and feeling questions. The appearances of Jesus Christ would seem to be always sudden, though they have been expected for centuries ; for they have been foretold by the most elaborate and dignified prophecy.

Two things always come suddenly into our experience, the great joy and the great loss. Death is always sudden. You have been watching for many a day, for a hundred days and more, and at the last it seemed to come without prediction or announcement. The light also comes suddenly into life; a great joy startles the soul into a new consciousness. You thought that you were prepared for the new man, the new prophet, the child that was to lead your house to greater conquests; but there was an element of suddenness in the appearance, a peculiar force of light, a deep consciousness that the universe must make way for another life, the biggest and most beautiful that ever lived in it. "And the Lord will suddenly come to His temple." Jesus Christ often met His disciples quite unexpectedly. Go, said the angel, and preach to His brethren the good news, and as they went Jesus met them, and added to the doctrine a personality, completed the historical resurrection by an actual visible presence, and that presence has never been withdrawn; our eyes are dim; the presence itself is always there. We see so little, because we look so helplessly and indifferently. Jesus would more frequently meet us if we were more frequently going in the right direction; He travels on certain roads; it is not suggested that He does not leave those roads, and go upon the unfrequented paths, but there is a pledge that where His people gather together He will be there. He also will be where Saul is, and He will burn the letters from the high priest, and Saul shall suddenly be struck down by a white flame at the gate of Damascus. The Lord haunts all the gates; He knows when we are fumbling over the lock that we may open it; if the gate is the right road He opens it from the other side; if the gate is the wrong one He vexes the lock and the key so that they cannot interplay. We live within the providence of God; we might meet Jesus Christ every morning if we went out to seek Him; He is the Lord of morning, He is the glory of the coming time, He has vested interests in the dawn.

With what infinite profitableness, were we so disposed, we might linger upon the environment of the Resurrection, comparing it with the environment

of the Birth, contrasting it rather than comparing it. Will you look at the two environments in relation to one another, and see how the environment varies according to the evolution of the Personality? You remember your own earliest environment; you would not have been without it for the world to-day, now that the snow of years is whitening your heads, you would not for the world go back to the environment which was once the expression of life's dearest holiday; you would not go back to the old nursery and the old toys and the old amusements and delights: When I was a child I spake as a child; when I became a man I put away childish things, I escaped from one environment into another, larger and wholly more fitted to my increasing manhood.

Shall we look at the environment of the Resurrection? What is that first object that you see? "It is a garden; there is a tomb in it." I do not speak of that, I reverse your sentence, retaining its history and enlarging its meaning. We could say moaningly and fretfully, almost, indeed, atheistically, There was a tomb in the garden. That is poor talk. How can you improve it? Easily, by almost inverting it: there was a garden round the tomb. That is better, the Gospel gleams in that nobler talk. In my lowest moods, in my saddest depression, I see only the tomb, and after some spirit has talked with me for a moment I lose sight of the tomb in the broader, lovelier view of the garden. Let the atheist say there was a tomb in the garden; I pray my God to help me to say there was a garden around the tomb.

Is there anything in the environment of the resurrection to match the garden beauty and the garden fragrance? Yes. What is it? Morning:—"As it began to dawn." It always begins to dawn when we are conscious of the presence and the blessing of the dear Lord. His coming means light, morning, something that has to grow, an increasing light, a gleam of the heavenly lightning that makes and seeks the eternal that it means. So far, then, the environment is right, garden and morning, how they match one another! what a duet is that! let them sing their music to the accompaniment of the spheres.

Garden and morning—what next? What we call spring, April, the time when the green blade is coming up or the little flower has fought its way through the frost and snow. When Christ rises all things rise; when Jesus comes up from the tomb there is no tomb, He has left it; now there is nothing but vernal beauty, vernal music thrills the responding air. A lovely environment, garden, morning, spring—what more? Angels. A beautiful picture it is to see the angel of the Lord coming and thrusting back the little pebble that was rolled to the door of the tomb, and—oh the subtle irony! oh the holy contempt!—rolling back the stone and sitting on it! Marmion waved the fragment of his blade in sign of victory, a sign in its way and at the time pardonable, but there stands out one utterance and expression of victory grander than Marmion's waving of his blade. The angel of the Lord flicked away the stone with its red Roman seal, and having set it a few inches away sat upon it. It is then a right beautiful environment, and full of holy suggestion, and wet with a very gracious pathos, wet as with sacred tears, such as might have dropped from heaven. Garden, morning, spring, angels; that is resurrection, resurging, coming back to flood and throne and final diadem.

We do not see all the beauty of that environment until we contrast it with the environment of the birth. What do we see at the nativity of Christ? A manger, and no garden; night—"and there were shepherds keeping their flocks by night." This Child is going to be born in the darkness, He may bring the light with Him, He has always done so, He will not fail at Bethlehem. A child always brings light with it; the darkness has notice to quit the moment the child cries. Manger, night, and what we call winter. We keep the Saviour's birthday when the snow is on the ground; the keener the frost, the more highly piled the snow, we say, This is true Christmas weather. Not resurrection weather; something has happened between the winter and the spring, something has taken place between the fall of that snow, the growing of that ice, and the breathing of that balmy breeze over Jerusalem. "This same Jesus," Jesus of the garden and the morning,

of the spring and of the angels, was once the Jesus of the manger and the night and the winter. Better that the environment were not reversed! We have a trick of going the other way. Some men have everything at their birth; their Bethlehem is gold and morning and garden and sun and feast, and their old age a withered failure, the fair page ill-written and crumpled as with contemptuous hands. There is a possibility of inverting what God has arranged as the natural evolution and proper culmination of life. It is sad to tears that a man should have everything before he is two years old; call it misfortune piled on misfortune that the boy should have traversed the galleries of Europe before he is thirteen years of age; call it an irony that a boy over-caked, over-fed, fondled and dandled and confectioned until at thirteen he is an old *roué*; the boy has exhausted everything and cries because there is not another world to exhaust. Blessed are the poor, blessed are they who have to count their shillings and fit their bread to the week, if so be they are honest in heart, independent, courageous, religious. You do not know what you owe to your poverty; you never would have been the man you are if you had been born anywhere else than at Bethlehem, cradled in the manger, surrounded by night, winter-bound, frost so severe on your front door that you cannot open it to get to the well which has been turned into one block of ice. These things are hard if hardly taken. Who are the men that shake the world? The men who were born at Bethlehem. Who are the men that come to the garden and the morning and the spring and the angels? The men who have had to travel from Bethlehem to Golgotha, and to travel that *via mala* not in their own strength, but in the presence and under the comforting inspiration of God and His Christ and the eternal Spirit. Of course there are great difficulties in the way, because many people have had to undergo the depleting and disennobling process of having been born in plenteousness and rocked in cradles of gold. Take our Lord's own course as an example and an encouragement; He was rich, and yet for our sakes He became poor, He made Himself of no reputation, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross: wherefore God hath highly exalted Him. To know nothing about

poverty may be not to have made the acquaintance of the best friend you could have had; you always have had so much that you did not feel the need of asking a blessing upon it, always so surrounded you did not know there was a God. The man who has no acquaintance with the poor man's sick chamber does not know what life is. If you would improve your tempers go and visit the sick poor; if you would enlarge your own spirit of contentment and satisfaction go down to those people whose lives are spent in struggle and pain and disappointment. So Jesus Christ began at the right end, began with manger and night and winter and fishermen, and went straight up to garden and morning and spring and angels. Let us take heart, then. We cannot help our poverty; sometimes we have been almost tempted to envy the boy at school who had everything, the boy who was so dressed that it never would have entered our imagination that he was going to school at all, he must have been going to some festival, to some exhibition day, to some grand show, and surely not to what we know as school, a hard master and a hard lesson and a bare board, and the pence hardly gathered by faithful industry and every penny of the pence with a hue of blood upon it. You never would have been so military and yet so forbearing, so dignified and yet so condescending, if you had not been the child of the manger and the night and the winter and the little fisherfolk. Never be ashamed of it! I will be ashamed of you if you are ashamed of the father and mother that did their best for you, though that best mayhap was but poor.

Look at the spiritual and ideal significance of these two environments, and especially the environment of the resurrection. What is the meaning of all this? The meaning is poetry, ideality, higher consciousness, a continually self-refining spirituality, a continually shedding off of the old and the poor and the mean that belongs to our own nature, and a constant rising into the true manhood. Always remember that there is a spiritual heredity as well as a bodily ancestry. You are pleased that your first remembered ancestor wore a gold ring. There is nothing to be particularly pleased about in that circumstance. And you, speaking on

the occasion, may say, I am the son of a man who worked for a gold ring and never wore it. I belong to an ancestry, quoth one, who shot king after king on field after field. And I, quoth another, have no blood records in my family—

“Higher far my proud pretensions rise,
A child of parents passed into the skies.”

And if you have the gracious soul, the beautiful spirit, the very soul of charity and helpfulness to others, that is fame. All else may be but infamy.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we thank Thee for the joys and the riches of memory. Thou dost enable us to go back upon our yesterdays, and accumulate them into one present and glowing witness to Thy truth and Thy love and Thy kindness infinite. Thou hast not limited us to this day, though Thou hast shut off to-morrow; we may go back into yesterday, we may not anticipate the day that is coming. We bless Thee for the history that cannot be written, for impressions and thoughts and songs for which there are no words and there can be no music; we bless Thee that the past cannot be taken away from us: we thank Thee that the writing is as a pen of iron upon a table of rock. We rejoice in Thy lovingkindness, we recall the days of old and make them young with the life and the hope of the present time. God forbid that we should deal treacherously with our memories; may remembrance be a sacrament, may the recall of olden time be the inspiration of the current hour. We thank Thee that every life has its history; we bless Thee that our days are rich with experience; may we as wise men accumulate that experience into an imperishable wealth. We will not remember the days of iniquity, because Thou hast cast them behind Thy back for ever. We will not drag out of the sea that which Thou hast cast into its depths, but we will remember at the Cross and in the name and the power of Christ that where sin abounded grace did much more abound. Amen.

XVII.

MEMORABLE DAYS.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, APRIL 20TH, 1899.

"I remember the days . . ."—PSALM cxliii. 5.

“ REMEMBER the days of old”: I may not interfere with to-morrow, on that side I am limited, and, indeed, humbled and held almost in contempt, I cannot see to-morrow morning; but whilst I have no liberty in the future I have the fullest liberty in the past; my imagination must not wander, but my heart may go back and recall all the sunshine, all the battle, all the triumph. He who knows yesterday knows to-morrow; he who is heavenly-minded is in heaven; he who is a true historian is a confident and triumphant prophet. So then, though we seem to be bounded by to-night, and have no inheritance beyond the river of the immediate darkness in which we sleep, yet when we bring a fuller and truer interpretation to bear upon the circumstances and all their suggestiveness, we are already in the Canaan that lies beyond the Jordan of the night.

“I remember the days”—when there were no days; I remember the period before duration was broken up into fragmentary hours and perishable opportunities; my time enables me to go back by spiritual interpretation and ideality into the chambers of the infinite, the eternal presence. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”; He does not tell us when He made the substance out of which He shaped them; we have to deal with heavens and earth, with shaped and organised creation. The history of chaos can never be written; chaos has no history: who can tell what God did before there were any fountains abounding with water? who knows anything about the solitude of God? We know nothing about the

days of old when God began to order and direct and shape and organise and relate element to element, and constitute society in its widest and profoundest definition; it may be but 4004 years before Christ, as the margin of the old Bibles assures us was the case, when God shaped the elements that were at His command, but when He created those elements, and out of what He evolved or educed them, no man can tell. Forty and six years, said the Jews, was the temple in building; what is the meaning of that expression? We must be very careful in its interpretation, or we shall fall into exactly the same confusion that many men have fallen into in estimating the days that are inestimable. Forty and six years was this temple in building; the record does not say forty and six years was the substance out of which the temple was built in creation. There is a substance and a shaping; there is an old chaos that has no calendar, and there is a cosmos that has its own schedule of time. Take the matter in the very simplest expression:—This beam of timber was made in six days; behold it, how large, how shapely, how tastefully decorated, how shaped to an expressive meaning in architecture; six days was this beam being fashioned. You employ the right word when you say fashioned; the timber out of which that beam was made was in the forest five centuries ago; the beam was shaped but yesterday. It is so with this whole creation; I know not, nor can any man inform me, when the substance of it was created, started, how it began, in what film and plasm it opened its wondrous course of evolution; but there was a time when it was created, shaped, organised, and set up as at once the theatre of history and one of the factors of development and progress.

“I remember the days”: I have written them down in my book kept in the treasure-house of mine heart; no thief can break through and steal; the days are my own, the history is a gathering of nuggets which I can melt and mint into the current coin which I need for to-day’s spending. Poor is he who has no yesterday; an atheist he must be who does not live in the days that are gone, and does not so live in them as to appropriate other men’s experi-

ence and add it to his own wisdom. We might all be rich; the memory should be a bank, nay, more, it should be a gold mine, it should be a peculiar and an inexhaustible treasure.

The days are very many, we can name but a few of them, but the few should represent the multitude. Our subject is Memorable Days, days that can never be forgotten; days that created a place for themselves in the field of the memory; days of strife and temple-building and triumph and sorrow unutterable; yet all the days accumulate into a day, the many becoming unified, the unity glowing like an altar on the highways of time.

Who does not remember what the psalmist calls in Psalm cxl. 7 the day of battle? There was a day when we heard of nothing but strife, fighting, strenuous conflict; all things were against us, the beasts of the field seemed to be our enemies, the trees in the orchard withdrew their fruit when we put out our unworthy hands to seize it; little children seemed to run away from us, the dog growled when we passed his kennel, and all life gathered itself up into a strenuous and apparently spiteful opposition. Remember that day; you will be the better for recalling it. Your strife and mine may have lain in different directions; some were fighting with human beings, some were fighting with difficult circumstances, some were fighting with overwhelming disappointments: the element of war was present in all cases; life was a fight; many a time we were going down in the dust, our feet had well-nigh slipped, our steps were enfeebled by uncertainty; the fist of the enemy was hard, yea, he brought a battering ram and smote the walls of our heart; yea, the angry contestant found his way into our house when we were asleep, and then he despoiled our estate; to-morrow called us to a fearsome conflict, but we remember that the battle was taken in hand by the living God, we remember that the horse and his rider He did cast into the depths of the sea, and they sank like a stone, and there came a voice from the excellent light, saying, No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; the enemy shall lift up his sword against thee, and I

will turn it into molten wax, and as for the enemy I will dash him in pieces like a potter's vessel. Recall the battle as your own; recall the victory as God's. God appoints the battle, God knows exactly how much fighting is good for us. History is made by fighters; let us always fight in the right spirit and for the right object, then we shall be in God's majority, though we may be overturned and overborne for a moment, and though it may be said that we were borne down by an overwhelming mediocrity—a much better word than majority!

Who is there that cannot recall what Nahum in the first chapter and seventh verse of his Burden calls the day of trouble? Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward. The expression the day of trouble is not confined to the Old Testament, it figures conspicuously in the New; the expression has also its own form of utterance and testimony in our own experience. The day of trouble is one of our greatest friends when it has had time to explain its black message, and when we have recovered from our days of trouble to see the face of the guest and to listen attentively and critically to his voice. "Call upon me in the day of trouble"; will you look into your engagement-book and tell me if you have any appointment for that day? You have not, it is left blank that God might fill it in; the blank has been filled up, but it was a blank, deep and agonising, until God did fill up the space with His gracious and hospitable invitation. "Call upon me in the day of trouble": the palace gates will be shut upon you, and the gates of some choice friends will be closed, and you may beat your knuckles into jelly upon the doors of some who profess to be your friends; they will not be at home when you call upon them in the day of trouble. Run and beat the portals of heaven, and at the first beat the gate will be opened, and the King will redeem His promise. Poor is the life that has had no trouble day; it is a mean, frivolous, shallow life. Trouble works miracles of sculpture in the countenance and miracles of music in the voice, and gives the hand a new masonry when it shakes some outstretched hand of love. Trouble may have been one of our best friends; it shattered many an idol, it showed just what windows

were southward and what windows opened upon the black north. You can tell who has had trouble by the very first sentence of his serious conversation; if your ear has been trained in the royal academy of heaven's music, you will know instantly who has had sorrow and who has had little or none. I know my Saviour by His tearful voice; He was a Man of sorrows and He was acquainted with grief; He never sees a little child in trouble but He sits down and speaks to the little wayfarer and dries his tears, as He has dried the tears of the ascended ones who accompany Him to the fountain in heaven. Christ never sees two weary wayfaring men in trouble but He joins them, and beginning at Moses, He expounds unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself; and when they get home they are new men, their hearts are unloaded of grief and are ready to receive the joy of realised redemption. Consult experience; have long conversation with the man whose house has for many a day been in the dark valley; he will help thee, he knows how to pray; his prayer may be brief, but in the power of Christ it reaches heaven and brings back the light you need.

And there is a day called in the Scriptures, notably in 2 Cor. vi. 2, the day of salvation. Jesus Christ used an equivalent expression in the house of Zaccheus; said He, "This day is salvation come to this house"; your day was a day of bondage, to-day is a day of salvation; yesterday you were slaves, to-day you are free men. Salvation is one of the greatest words in all language; it is as great as love, it is as glorious as light, it is as welcome as rain when the earth has been famishing for want of water. Salvation has often been degraded into small meanings and trivial issues; salvation is a word that might too easily become an aspect of selfishness: salvation properly interpreted and properly represented, means salvation from sin, guilt, error, darkness, prejudice, littleness, selfishness, ignorance; a grand redemption, an uplifting of the whole man into a new atmosphere and a worthier environment. Some days have a peculiar light, the clouds somehow become so interrelated as to give a new interpretation and expression to the commonplace sunshine; sometimes we call each other's attention to the

peculiar light ; how broken it is, how apocalyptic, how it shapes itself into towers and minarets and mountains, and how it hides great seas at its base ; a strange light, a sevenfold glory, the apocalypse of to-day's New Testament.

It must have been some such day, spiritually interpreted, that Paul had in mind when he said in 1 Cor. xi. 13, "The day shall declare it." I have heard of the day of battle, and the day of trouble, and the day of salvation, now here is a day of revelation, declaration, illumination, that shows you exactly what you have been doing, and what you are, and whither you are going. Marvellous day ! We shall not truly see ourselves or our work until that day dawns ; then how innumerable our mistakes will appear, how grievous our miscalculations, how utterly unworthy our misconstructions of other men's characters and other men's service ; then we shall be ashamed of ourselves ; the day will not speak in words, it will only show what we are and what we have done, and then we shall call upon the rocks and the mountains to fall upon us and hide us from deserved wrath. The sun does not make the dust in the chamber, the sun only reveals it ; the hireling hand has cleaned the room, and the unhired sun comes and looks at it and retires with meaning silence. There is a day of sunshine, a day of declaration, when our motives will be seen, when the chamber of imagery far down in the heart will stand up like a chamber set upon a hill which cannot be hid ; then we shall know what need we have of redemption and sanctification. We should ask the Lord often to send that day to us that we may just see what we are at our best. Oh what foulness we may then see in the sanctuary ! what foulness in our own prayers, what putridity in our own child ! then we may see the marks of the thief's fingers upon our gold ; then we may in honesty give back the eulogies which men in ignorance yet in hopefulness have poured upon the whited sepulchres of our daily hypocrisy.

In Eccles. vii. 1 we read of another day, common day, "the day of death." There is no discharge in that war. You may have company until the last day and the last noon of that day and the last sunset of that day, but after that you must go alone. There are some fifty

odd yards of life's pilgrimage that every pilgrim must walk alone. How gladly would some of us go with that vanishing pilgrim, how gladly take his place, how gladly speak some gospel worthy of his then condition! The door is shut, the decree is spoken; the last few words have no companionship. One by one, but every one. Oh that men were wise, that they would consider these things, that they would look upon and piously consider their latter end! We must needs all die, and be as water spilled on the ground which cannot be gathered up; one dieth in his full strength, wholly at ease and quiet; another dieth in the bitterness of his soul and never eateth with pleasure; one event happeneth to them all. Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his. It may be—it *may* be quite a grand thing to have no God, no faith, no dogma, no church, no altar, it may be; but from what we have seen of the last moments of people's lives it would seem to be an infinitely grander thing to have a living God, a redeeming Christ, an assuring and comforting Spirit, the declaration which the soul can hear, "And after death is heaven." We have chosen that aspect of things; there may be men so unaccountably constituted or so unaccountably self-perverted as to find joy in emptiness, in negation, in selfishness; my soul come not thou into their secret, but build thine house near the altar of God; nay, bring that altar under thy roof, and then let death come, it will find thee ready. It must come, how shall it come? a foe? a friend? Let every man decide the solemn inquiry for himself.

There is another day referred to in Genesis xxxii. 26, "the day breaketh"; the breaking day, the dawning day, the larger light, the sabbath day. There is poetry in the very word day-break; it is a poem in a hyphened word. "Till the day break and the shadows flee away": we wait for the day! When Paul and his co-voyagers were in Adria, the historian says that they did all that lay in their power, and then they waited for the day; in still more explicit and holy language, they wished for the day. There is liberation in light. There is no gaol so deep and so unbearable as the prison of darkness; we know not what it holds, we cannot tell what loathsome beast may be one stride of our standing place, we cannot tell but that if we move

we shall dash our brains out against some protruding rock. What then do we do? we wish for the light, we wish for the day; one little beam would signify liberty, one laugh of light would signify and herald a festival of joy—alive! That is what we want. O ye great poets, sing of the day, repeat your prayer, it suits eloquent lips like yours—light! When the Amen of God comes the morning will shine upon the rejoicing and liberated earth.

“The daybreak;” there is a daybreak of the soul, a dawn of the heart, the new light that means new life. Sometimes that light falls upon the green bush and glows in it like a fire that does not consume; may be, out of that glowing bush we may hear a voice, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. Sometimes the daybreak falls upon our circumstances, and then we say, You see the case is obvious, our course is perfectly clear; light shines upon the whole situation; this way, and we find rest. Do not try to make your own daybreak. A ship can never navigate itself by its own light, it has its greens and its blues and its reds and its manufactured lamps, all of which could be sold at a valuation and removed with a cart; trust you in the steady planetary fire or in the northern star or in some other celestial sign. Do not live in a painted daybreak that some little new social programme has made for you. We must not hasten even the daybreak, we must wait for it. For myself, I have no intention of crying Hosanna to the daybreaks of inventive men; I will take my morning only from the eastern sky, I will not go to some peddling ironmonger and buy a lamp that will banish the night or bring in the summer. Have no commerce in such ironmongery. Go thou to Him Who is the light of the world. His smile is daybreak. His blessing is heaven.

We may well be afraid to look back upon many of our days, for they are witnesses against us, speaking with an eloquence and an emphasis which it is impossible for us to drown. In the great day of account we shall be witnesses against ourselves. We shall not need some energetic accuser to stand up and in his official capacity charge us with sin against God and the law. Our own hearts shall condemn us, and our

tongue shall be left absolutely without one word or self-defence. What then is our hope, and what our refuge? When we ask this question from the very centre of the heart, in an agony of penitence, there comes back upon us the grand evangelical answer, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." Not nitre and soap, not rushing waters or acids discovered by chemistry, but the redeeming blood of Christ alone can find out the deep guilt of our criminal yesterdays, and cleanse them from every defiling stain. If we would meet the day of the Lord's judgment, we must first avail ourselves of the day of God's redemption. The most memorable day in all the ages of history was the day when Jesus Christ cried upon the cross, "It is finished." The most memorable day in the soul's experience will be the day on which the soul cried in the bitterness of shame and helplessness, "God be merciful unto me a sinner." We may date our heaven from God's answer to that prayer. We need not die in order to enter into heaven; if we have entered into the mystery of the divine pardon, and have been permitted by God to enter into fellowship with His Spirit, we have already passed the shining portals, and we are already in the presence of the King! Count no birthday, no wedding day, no festival day, until you have realised the day of the new birth, until you are the bride of the Lamb, until you have drunk the wine of love with your redeeming and delivering Saviour. That golden hour will make itself felt backward and forward through all the days of the sinful past and through all the ages of a cloudless eternity.

PRAYER.

ALmighty GOD, we thank Thee for the life, the character, and the service of Thine honoured servant, Oliver Cromwell. May we inherit his spirit whilst we celebrate his name ; may this be no ceremony, but a time of inspiration, and renewal, and outfit in the power of the Holy Ghost. We thank Thee that he stood fast in Thy decrees and counsels, and that he hugged Thine own covenant to his heart. May we feed on the same food, and be nourished into the same nobleness, and exert the same beneficent influence ; may we follow Oliver Cromwell as he followed Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, whom we adore as our only Priest, our King of kings, in whose Cross alone we have hope for time and for eternity. Amen.

XVIII.

THE CROMWELL OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

PREACHED ON TUESDAY MORNING, APRIL 25TH, 1899.



THE text is in the Book of Ezra, chapter ix. verse 3: "When I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished"—unmanned, humiliated, shattered.

We have lost the genius of indignation ; no man is astonished now. When we lose astonishment at moral outrages, sins, crimes, we are no longer worthy to live. But we are fallen on quiet times ; we live on very neighbourly terms with men who misrepresent the Christ, and we call it courtesy, good neighbourhood, and we say of this or of that man, He is very good and very brotherly. About the man I say nothing ; we are not dealing with personalities in this great controversy,

but we are dealing with great principles. The great charge which I have to bring against some men is not personal, but that they, unknowingly it may be, utterly misconceive and totally misrepresent the purpose of the Incarnation. But so many of us are invalids that we do not like even strong language. If a man were to rise amongst us now who took strong measures under certain ecclesiastical provocations, we would make partly a livelihood out of him by condemning his violent methods. We do not like violence; I believe in violence after every other method has been exhausted. Until we get back conviction, and conviction that will make itself felt, our rhetoric is but a noise.

Ezra was the Cromwell of the Old Testament; a scripture-reader, quite a priest and a scribe, saturated with the law, permeated by the spirit of righteousness; a right valiant and outspoken man. He would have a hard time of it if he lived now! It is so comforting to think that all the Cromwells lived long ago. I dread nearly every celebration of a great name; there is such a tendency or temptation in the direction of mere admiration, without copying the example or reproducing the energy or exercising the influence. We celebrate Cromwell best by spreading the principles of Cromwell. I have no doubt whatever that if Martin Luther were to return we should expel him from this Church. What else could we do with a man who called Calvin a beast, and described the Epistle of James as an epistle of straw, and variously occupied himself on the Sabbath Day not according to our notions? It is an awful thing to celebrate a name without catching the mantle and the spirit. Do not let the spirit die; I do not care about mere epitaphs and Old Mortalities digging the moss out of them; I want living Cromwells, living righteousness, living obedience to the law of God and of grace.

A very curious little history is this of Ezra. He was about to lead up a second company of the Captivity; Artaxerxes, the king, was most friendly, and gave him one of the longest letters known in ancient history. Artaxerxes described himself in

Oriental pomp as king of kings; he gave Ezra a letter that opened his way wherever he went; Ezra was commended, approved, endorsed, certificated; he could do what he liked in the lands through which he passed. He left the king on good terms; he had evidently made a strong impression upon the king as to the nature, the quality, the attributes of the God of Israel. The two men parted. Ezra went his way; and it came to pass that when he and his host came to a certain river they pitched their tents, and studied for three days an intricate problem how to go on. Nobody knew the way. There were the men, and the women, and the little ones, and the substance. No one could tell what enemies were ahead waiting for unprotected caravans, determined to seize all booty, to slay all opponents who would hinder their will. Said Ezra: "I am in great perplexity about this; I have been looking round, and there are no ministers amongst us, no Levites; the religious element, as it is popularly understood amongst us, is not represented in this host; I am somewhat afraid of that grim wilderness, but I should be ashamed to go back to the king after the sermon I preached to him about the God of the Hebrews, and say to him, Artaxerxes, my theology is very good on paper, and I seemed to make a good impression upon your royal mind, but now that I have come to face the difficulties of life, I should like you to give me the assistance of a few soldiers and other servants of the throne, just to start me in the direction of the wilderness; let them go a mile or two with me, let the king grant me a convoy that I may go out with some sort of aspect at least of coolness and preparedness for any contingency. No! I should be ashamed. What! after preaching as I have preached about the God of the Hebrews, telling him that He is able to lead, guide, direct by cloud, by fire, as He will, go back and cringe to Artaxerxes, and say, Give me a convoy of soldiers? Never!" I like the hero's sensitiveness: said he, To put it on no deeper ground, I should have to eat my own words, take back my own sermons; I who have sung the Hallelujah Chorus, I who represent old Moses and his rod, I, up to this time, the last of the priests, have been telling Artaxerxes and all the people round about that

the God of the Hebrews can handle the case and carry it right through to completion; and now the devil says, Ezra, you might go back and tell Artaxerxes that quite an unexpected difficulty has arisen, something that nobody really could have foreseen; and if he would not mind lending you a few soldiers and a few horses, then all would go smoothly. Never! God, or nothing; Jehovah, not Artaxerxes; we have turned our back upon the kings of the lands, it is now God and His covenant.

I like the man, so far. I expect to hear further concerning him. He went on, he made progress, he did not know all that was proceeding. One day there came to him certain princes of Israel and told him the bad news, told him of the lust and the adultery and the shame of Israel, told him that the princes had been chief in this trespass; and when he heard it he rent his mantle and his garment, and tore the hair of his head and of his face, and sat down astonished. They were not the meaner vermin, not the minor satraps and underlings of the camp, but the princes, the natural heads and leaders of tribes; the whole head was sick, the men that ought to have led were the worst in this most unholy outrage; and the prophet tore his mantle and his garment, and sat until the evening sacrifice, and arose tremblingly, and spread out his hands to the offended heavens, and said, I dare not look at them, for my face is one red blush of shame: O, Lord God, our trespass has grown up unto the heavens, and we have shut out the light of Thy countenance by our sins; we, Thy nominal noblemen, Thy princes who ought to have led the people, we have done this great shame; Thou didst promise us a wall in Judah and a nail in Jerusalem, but we are not worthy: O God, if there is pity left in Thine infinite heart, slay us not, but give us room for repentance: I speak of myself as well as the princes, I know I am not technically guilty of this outrage, lust has lighted no fires in my heart, I have not done evil among the women of the land through which we have passed, but I cannot exonerate myself, there is none righteous, no, not one: O, hear the priest when he prays for the people, and if Thou canst spare us and still give us,

if it be only a nail in Thy house, that will do as a pledge: God help us! A heroic point in history, one of the noblest, most outstanding points in the development of the spiritual world of mankind.

We cannot do without prayer. Men pray best when, so to say, they are forced to pray. It is agony that makes a man eloquent; it is Gethsemane that gets the best of his blood out of him. Ashamed, and distressed, and humiliated, and wronged, Ezra still prayed for the people. We need the intercession of the saints. We have all done what we ought not to have done, we have left undone the things we ought to have done: God be merciful to me a sinner! should be the cry of every heart. It is infinitely sad when the prince goes wrong. It is bad enough when his coachman plays at cards, but when the prince himself is taken red-handed in the act, then let the country mourn, and let the throne despair of itself. We look to princes for noble deeds, for high example. If I find my prince or my premier on the race-ground, I do not like it. I know what is said about breeding fine animals, and what is said about distinguishing the essence from the accident, and making a broad distinction between the races and those who turn the races into an occasion for gambling; I have heard all that plea: and He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh. There is nothing in it; it is an excuse, it is taking advantage of a mean explanation.

Ezra was in a very different position. The difficulty of Ezra is the difficulty of to-day. Ezra might have had next to no difficulty about the men and the women, but his difficulty was about the little ones. Just our problem to-day—about which we talk so much that may be described in an unthinking moment as pious nonsense. We must get into the conviction that God is able to take care of the men and the women and the little ones: He carrieth the lambs in His bosom. I make no distinction in the application of a great vital principle. I am not a Nonconformist at one end of the case and a Conformist at the other. I say that God will take care of the little ones, and He will see they are educated; and I should be

ashamed to ask any political officer to eke out the covenant of God, to give me a little by way of arrangement, to see me just over a certain difficulty. No! The little ones belong to God, and the Church must rouse itself and see about them, and we must have a developed and intelligent zeal in all this matter, and not go back to Artaxerxes, and tell him that it is really only for the little ones we are soliciting a little attention. God counts the little ones, and loves the little ones. It is not sharp logic to carry His government right through to the babes, it is consistency; and until we are either one thing or the other, we shall be nothing, and our influence will go for nothing, and we shall be people to be compounded with and dined out of our convictions.

Let us hear Ezra to-day. He says: When I heard that a Christian professor had broken his word, I rent my mantle and my garment, and I sat down astonished; he professed to love my Lord, his lips were wet with the sacrament blood-wine, and over those reddened lips he poured a black lie; he broke his word, he proved himself dishonourable and unworthy and unfaithful; he cast away his religion in the market-place; I sat down astonished, and I cried bitterly and penitentially to God. Paul said, Many walk of whom I have told you often, and tell you now, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the Cross of Christ. No outward enemy beat down Ezra; the great collapse was internal. Only Christians can inflict deadly damage on Christianity. The atheist can do but little; his is a blunt axe and wanting in weight, and he himself is wanting in skill; but any man who drinks the blood of sacrament and then breaks his word hurts, not his theology, but his God, his Saviour; he renews the tragedy of the Cross. What do we do now? We say, To err is human; no doubt some little breach was committed, certainly this or that may have occasioned a good deal of solicitude and even pain, but we must hope for the best. That is not the right talk, and that is not the right tone; but you can never talk about another man's faults in the right way until you have fronted yourself and told yourself that you have crucified the Lord; and in the degree in which you have

thus brought the crime home and punished yourself, you will be able in a tone that has redemptive music in its cadence to reprove another man. We must not attempt to make ourselves virtuous by magnifying the vices of others; we shall be following Ezra in his noblest course when we pray for those who have sinned, and yet speak about that sin in frank, explicit, emphatic, unmistakable words. We want free speech and frank speech, true speech that goes through and through the case, and that first of all slays with God's sword the critic himself.

When I heard that a Nonconformist got rich and went into the Cabinet, and turned his back on his father and his mother, so far as their principles and their education were concerned; when I heard that a man had turned his back upon the Nonconformity that washed him, clothed him, educated him, gave him his first chance in life, and then went over to the side that had done nothing for him but persecute his ancestors, I rent my garment and my mantle, and I sat down astonished. I for one would not have him preside at a meeting of the Liberation Society. I would bear the loss; I would count his absence a gain. We are not interested in religion otherwise than as religion; the great liberation idea is religious essentially; political, accidentally or consequently; but the great central fundamental idea is this, that a State Church misrepresents the Christ, misrepresents every wound in His dear body, misrepresents the purpose of His incarnation. That is my charge, that my impeachment, and from that I cannot be seduced because I have the chance of having a Front Bench man to preside over deliberations in which his soul takes no part. I believe that we may have to get rid of some people; I growingly feel that we may be fewer and yet stronger. I am wearied with your milk-and-water men, and I am wearied with any party that only tampers and palters with great questions, and I would not raise a hand to bring back any party that brought with it only a shuffling and superficial programme. We want a fundamental, a beneficent, a reconstructive policy; and if God be for us who can be against us? I do not now count hands, I have left the fallacy of quantity and gone over to the

truth of quality. Many a good cause has been driven down, and will be driven down this spring, as it has been for many other springs, absolutely driven down by an overwhelming mediocrity. I do not want to be a popular preacher; I want the preacher, whether he be popular or unpopular, to be fearless, independent, gracious, inflexible in justice. You may starve him, but God will nourish his soul.

When I heard that the Kaiser went to the East, and after a dinner—hear this, for there is no more solemn word in the speech of Christianity—when I heard that the Kaiser went to a dinner, and in an after-dinner speech said, “My friend, the Sultan,” I was astonished, I could have sat down in humiliation and terror. The Great Assassin had insulted civilisation, and outraged every Christian sentiment, and defied concerted Europe. He may have been the Kaiser’s friend, he was not yours, he was not mine, he was not God’s. Down with such speaking! and let every man’s voice be heard on this matter; then the Liberals may come back to power. So long as any man can say, “My friend, the Sultan,” I wish to have no commerce of friendship with that man. The Sultan drenched the lands with blood, cut up men, women, and children, spared none, ripped up the womb, bayoneted the babe, and did all manner of hellish iniquity. He may have been the Kaiser’s friend, but in the name of God, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost—speaking of the Sultan, not as an individual, not merely as a man, but speaking of him as the Great Assassin—I say, God damn the Sultan!

When I heard that these things were done I rent my garment and my mantle, and I sat down unmanned, with a great sob in my throat; I thought the case of mankind was given up even by the Lord that redeemed the race. When I the other day had an account sent in to me to be paid, and when I read one word in that account, I rent my mantle and my garment, and I sat down astonished. It was a bill for a grave, the deepest grave I ever dug, and at the top of the bill was a designation of the ground, and that one word was “Unconsecrated.” Shame! a thousand shames! Who was laid there? A brain

that never entertained an ignoble thought, a heart that never had a selfish desire, a hand that was never stretched out but in helpfulness and love, and to call her resting-place "unconsecrated"—a thousand shames. Let the whole earth cry Shame! These are not things to be passed over lightly. They may mean nothing to some people, but it meant much to me. It meant a wound where the wound was already too deep, it meant vitriol poured upon a red gaping sore. "Unconsecrated!" said I. Am I to be told that this is merely a technical term, simply a mere verbal expression, notifying only an ecclesiastical arrangement? No, it is more; it is a knavish trick; it is a popish device. It is a detestable blasphemy.

I will more and more, so help me God, endeavour to be faithful to the principles which I cherish and to the religion which has redeemed me, and I will be more and more faithful to the Nonconformists who have made England a possible country to live in. Of course, we shall all be condemned for our violent methods and our violent expletives, and for our ungovernable and hyperbolical ways of representing other views and phases of truth. I am prepared to pay the price. Let these pews, which I have had around me some thirty years, be emptied, and let my stipend go down to a crust and a spoonful of water, and let who may go from me, I shall be richer without them if they do not sympathise with me in these deep convictions and grand enthusiasms.

When I heard that some men took Protestant money and practised popish tricks, I sat down astonished. It is an unpardonable paradox; it is a most blasphemous irony. I do join in the cry, when properly defined, No popery! There is a sense in which we all disavow it; that is, the sense in which we would limit a teacher of the popish religion and forbid him to teach his dogmas and practise his ceremonies under state penalty. Nothing of the kind. Let every man have the fullest liberty to expound his principles and to practise his ritual, but I say, No popery in Protestantism! When I say, No popery, I am not condemning the Pope, but I am condemning men who, taking Protestant money, are serving popish ends. I

accuse many in the so-called Church of England of doing this very thing. I cannot give them credit for being honest men. I believe that such kind of practice begets a species of conscience that deals casuistically with itself. I am willing to make all allowances in that direction; but Protestantism is one thing, and popery is another, and we must broadly distinguish between the two, and we must be either the one thing or the other. I can respect an honest Papist, I can respect an honest Puritan, but I cannot respect the man who tries to be both at one and the same time. We must take great care how we conduct ourselves along these lines, for they are most delicate. There may be a Nonconformist ritualism, there may be a dissenting sacerdotalism. Did I see you hastening away from the May meetings that you might go down to your church in the country in time to, as the common phrase is, I know not whence it came, "administer the Lord's Supper"? My dear sir, do not administer it, and do not you hasten back with your little black May meeting bag to administer it. Let any Christian man or woman administer it. Oh, if my mother could give me the broken bread and the shed blood in type, I would kiss her hand and her heart as an angel sent of God.

Let us be very careful, therefore, about our "regular" ministries and "ordained" ministers and our "regulated" and scheduled way of doing things which nobody else can be allowed to do except under our suggestion or supervision. Away with it! If it be a question of order, so far so good, and right and proper, and it may be in many cases almost essential to the happy working of things. I am speaking about a principle, not about an occasional or an incidental feature and circumstance; but would that all the Lord's people were prophets! I know the danger, I know that some persons might get into the pulpit who would have no business to be there, but I, having stood before the people fifty odd years as a preacher, I can trust the people. They know who's who; they know whether this man came in by the front door or the back door or by some postern gate. They know, and they are as cruel as righteousness. The people are the best guardians of our institutions.

PRAAYER.

WE live and move and have our being in God : may our hearts be Thy dwelling-place, may our souls know Thy breathing, may we be familiar with God, may we walk with God, may we be the friends of God, may there be no distance between God and the soul. We would commune with God, we would look up into His face and see the shining of His smile, we would listen lest one tone of His music should be lost. Thou hast told us how to pray ; help us to shut the door, to shut out the world and the enemy and the great fear which spoils prayer ; help us to pray in the all-prevailing Name. Jesus is the name we love ; it means blood, redemption, deliverance, cleansing ; in that great Name we pray, and in His patience we wait God's answer. Amen.

XIX.

SIMPLICITY IN PRAYER.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, APRIL 27TH, 1899.

"The children of Israel asked the Lord."—JUDGES i. 1.



JUST that ! How we have modernised and complicated and destroyed prayer ! "The children of Israel asked the Lord." Just that ! How simple, how direct, how sensible, how likely to succeed ! We have modernised and spoilt everything. We say the pulpit has lost its power ; that may be true, but if true it is the pulpit that has lost it, it is not an enemy that has broken it. The pulpit may have given up its power, and the responsibility must be fixed upon the pulpit ; no competition has ruined us. The altar may have lost its power ; no atheist has pulled down the altar, no outsider has taken away one stone from the holy pile ; the suppliants may have torn down their own altar. We will modernise and invent and enlarge and embroider the simplicity that would

have saved us. Mischief cannot be kept back; unholy fingers must be writing new methods and new programmes and setting up new ideas, and calling all this mischief progress. We may have renounced idolatry, but we are great at idol-making still. Man loves to make little idols, if it is only a new form of service, introducing a little something here and a little something there, and especially that ill-looking and most uncomfortable idol called adapting ourselves to the times. The mischief-maker has got into the Church, and he will do the Church no good; and no man will do the Church good except in the spirit of God he take the Church back to its beginning, its ideal, when the Church was a Divine thought and a Divine purpose.

"The children of Israel asked the Lord," whispered to Him, hailed Him, arrested His condescending attention by some sign of necessity. They whispered to the Lord, they told Him plainly the condition in which they were placed, and brought the whole need under His attention; they wanted leadership and captaincy and guidance, and they said, Who shall do this? The Lord needs no notice of our little questions; He always says, I have fixed, I have chosen, the whole matter is arranged; it is interesting to me to hear you talk, but your talk awakens no new ideas in the infinite mind, everything has been provided for; still, if it does you good to speak to me, lift up your faces in expectancy. The method has not been changed; Jesus Christ added nothing to this old method. Said He, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Just that! so simple, so instantaneous; O these lightning prayers and lightning answers! Paul did not change the method: In everything by prayer and supplication make known your wants unto God; be careful for nothing; ask about everything. James did not alter the plan: If any man lack wisdom, let him ask. That is the old word, "ask," short but deep, easy to pronounce, impossible to measure. We have changed all that; we now are in danger of approaching the Lord as if He were an infinite Shah, and must needs be approached with long words and logical sequence. We have vivisected our own souls

and torn out our own prayers that we might arrange them, and we have even ventured sometimes almost to enlarge the idea of prayer so as to lose its original meaning.

The method is not changed. The mischief-maker is still troubling you in your church. He wants to revise the old method; he thinks the young people would like something new. Would any young soul like a new spring, a new summer? only in the sense in which it brings back all the old springs and all the old summers, the odours of a thousand generations. He wants no new scent to the rose, no new perfume does he crave for the blue violet; the little violet itself may be in a literal sense new and of yesterday, but the violet-idea is the old poem of root and beauty and the gospel of fragrance. Our holidays are ruining us. They are setting new programme-makers to work in the Church. The programme-maker wants a little more chanting and a little more singing, and a little less preaching, and he has a wonderful idea of shortening everybody's part in the programme except his own; he would turn the evening service into a baptized amusement, he would bring out interesting addresses by uninteresting speakers, and would supplant the old sermon by some barren, unsuggestive remarks upon misunderstood events. The fact is that the old simplicity will return, the old simplicity will come back; you have only to wait for its recurrence: and do not throw yourselves into any fever of anxiety as to what will become of the Gospel. All other things are new; they have their vogue, they catch the accent of the day, they are filled with a spirit of leisure and amusement and recreation; they will rise, fail, perish, but the word of the Lord abideth for ever.

"The children of Israel asked the Lord." That was the plain way, that was the simple way, that is the intensely rational way. We have got rid of some men by putting them into an atmosphere which is fatal to healthy thinking and to resonant and emphatic speaking. We have given them coronets that they may hold their tongues; we may have promoted them that we may get rid of them. It may be so in its

spiritual significance with the Lord ; we have polysyllabled Him and addressed Him in long formal speeches ; we have lost the old way of asking Him, talking to Him, breathing upon Him, kissing His hand, and whispering to Him just what we want. Our hope, and the hope of the whole Church, is in simplicity. Such was the method of the text, such the method of Jesus Christ, and of Paul and of James and of all the great historic suppliants on whose girdle has hung the key of the upper sanctuary. Speaking to God elevates the mind ; prayer, however brief and however tremulous, takes the suppliant up to a higher level than he has ever scaled before. If a speaker would be really dignified, lofty, majestic, he must betake himself to the language of supplication and to the rhetoric of the Holy Book. The whole idea of religion is intellectually elevating ; no man can be truly religious and meanly little ; to touch the Divine garment even at its edge is to rise to a new stature and to breathe a new air. Take it as the testimony of history, that wherever true religion prevails there is an elevation of mind and of character and of the whole personality, and if religion has not lifted up a man into a new level and clothed him with a new individuality he does not know religion as God means religion to be known. Every attention which a man pays to the house of God elevates the man, gives him a new tone and a new brightness ; no man can light a lamp in God's house and for God's sake without being the better for the exercise. There are no secularities in the Church. There the mischief-maker has been at work again, and he has divided things up into spiritualities and temporalities in connection with the Church : there are no temporalities, there is no little business connected with the altar. Count thyself a king, a priest before God, and a mighty man if thou have but to lay the book on the board, or light the lamp or open the door, or show some incoming visitor to a seat where he may sit and think about things heavenly.

I repeat, therefore, that asking God, talking to God, communing with God, elevates the mind. It is the spiritual exercise that elevates the soul ; the words themselves may be poor, they may be ungrammatical,

they may be uttered in a very halting and stumbling tone, but the exercise, spiritually understood, rightly interpreted, lifts the soul world on world a thousand worlds higher than can ever be occupied by a mere denizen of this world of dust. We cannot look God in the face without catching something of the brightness of His smile. You may not know what that radiance is which shines like a dawn upon your face; those who look on with wise observation take knowledge of you that you have been with God. You can tell whether a man has been keeping up his life of prayer; his witness is in his face; that face grows in vulgarity where the soul does not commune with God day by day, it loses beauty, every feature of nobleness, every expression of spirituality: "the shew of their countenance doth witness against them"; there is an invisible sculptor who chisels the face into the upper meaning and attitude of the soul. "They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus"; there was something about these common plain people that there was about nobody else: was it an atmosphere? was it an effluence, something rising out of the soul, and sanctifying the very air upon which it fell? The great and mighty scholars of the time took knowledge of the plain, common, unlearned folks that they had been with Jesus, their garments smelled of the cassia and of all the fragrant flowers that grow round the feet of the dweller in Gethsemane. Do they take knowledge of us that we have been with the literature of the day, with the journals of the morning, with the gossip of the time? or do they take knowledge of us that we have just come from the altar, that we have just seen the King, that we have not a moment ago been closeted with Christ, having shut the door, and do we come out of the presence-chamber new born, newly ordained, just crowned with the approbation of the Divine love? No man can say with a sincere heart, God pity me, God be merciful unto me a sinner, without being intellectually elevated, mentally and spiritually refined; he has been bathing his soul in the Divine atmosphere, and there is something about him not to be put adequately into words which plainly says, This man has been with the Father and with the Son and with the Holy Ghost. When we get back to that simplicity we shall get

back to power, to the most beneficent and penetrating influence.

Talking to God, asking God, laying the whole case before God, sometimes laying it before Him without words, sometimes simply looking into His face, sometimes letting our throbbing, aching misery look into the infinite peace of the Divine tranquillity, will lift a man to a new status and clothe him with a new influence and enrich him with an abiding benediction. Let your misery seek the face of the King. Sometimes a poor broken heart has said to the King, Lord, how long? she is so long in coming back; she is so far away: oh, if I saw a dog in such misery as mine I would pity the beast: am I not much better than a dog? You cannot say these words without becoming in a little time—you may require half-an-hour, grief may ask for a few moments in which to swallow the bitterness of the cup—but you cannot say these words with a true heart without being in due time younger, stronger, mightier, and you will face the public as if you never had a grief; you will be more than conquerors. Do not keep anything from God; you know perfectly well that you cannot keep anything from His omniscience; that is not the meaning of the exhortation; the meaning rather is, Tell God everything as if He had never heard it, go and tell Jesus. The Christ, of course, knows all that has happened, He has seen every drop of the trickling blood, He has heard every groan of the suffering man, He knows all you can tell Him and infinitely more, and yet He so knows the human heart that He says in effect, Now, poor broken one, tell me all about it: how was it, how did it begin, how did it proceed, and what is the end of the tragedy? prithee, sit down in the presence of the King, and tell Him the story of blood. This is the condescension of God, this is the great comfort and strength of the Almighty, that He allows us to cry in His presence, and that He puts our tears in His bottle, and one day we shall see them again, and repent that we ever shed them in any degree in which their shedding reproached the gentle providence of God.

Do not ask the man who never prayed to tell you

what he thinks of prayer. People are tempted to make a great mistake in that matter. They are going to hear an agnostic lecture on the subject of prayer! A man cannot lecture on that theme. Sooner ask a deaf man to tell you his candid opinion of Beethoven than ask a prayerless man to tell you what he thinks of prayer. Ask the man who never was an inch from his own fireside what he thinks of the climate of the North Pole or the South. This is, grotesque as it may appear on a momentary view, very much what many people do in relation to all spiritual questions; they ask the unspiritual man to give a judgment upon spiritual subjects. He cannot! Go to the praying soul if you really want to know what prayer is, and what answer it brings to the cry of pain and the sob of grief. Consult saintly souls about the value of prayer. This is not a matter of merely intellectual opinion; the intellect has no right or standing here, except in the degree in which it is simplified and sanctified, and when it bows its proud head before the heavens and says, Lord, pity me! then ask what intellect has to say about the kingdom of God.

“The children of Israel asked the Lord.” They did not dictate to Him. Prayer is not dictation; prayer is not always even suggestion, and when prayer is suggestion it is offered with halting breath and with a most reverent faith, lest a suggestion should be not only a sophism but an expression of selfishness. God does permit us to say what we would like; He is so condescendingly gentle that He sometimes asks us what we would like to have, and when we have told Him He has oftentimes said, No. At the time it was severe, but with one exception I have lived to know that every time God has denied my supplication He was right and I was wrong; that one exception waits; my soul thinks it will puzzle God to find an answer, but we must go back on the past, and by the lamp of the past we must try to throw a light on the gloom of the future. With one exception in my life, God has never given me a pain without it having been sanctified into a high pleasure, and sometimes He says, Thinkest thou that I am not able to do this? and then unbelief says, In my present mood I say, Lord, Thou art not able. We have frank interviews; I will not take my hypocrisy

into the closet and shut the door upon it and talk to God in false accents ; I will take my sorrow, misery, unbelief, and momentary atheism, and lay it bare before the Divine eyes and the Divine love. He has done wonders : His mercy endureth for ever. I cannot say that now, except by quotation ; we must wait ; to-morrow brings its own dew and its own dawn.

Ask God about everything ; you undervalue life if you think there is anything beneath His attention ; the very smallest thing that concerns you concerns Him ; He has told us so in many a beautiful parable. Saith He, A sparrow cannot fall to the ground without my notice. What does He mean ? His meaning is not confined to the sparrow, it is a parable that covers the whole necessity and agony of life ; therefore He says in effect by this parabolical illustration, Tell me everything, take time over it, never mind the grammar of the expression (a God that takes notice of grammar, who shall describe Him ?) ; punctuate your utterances with sobs ; I know the language of grief, I know the whole gamut of the heart's utterance ; now tell me all about it, and say to me just like a little child what you want me to do. Sometimes I ask my Father things that are so small that I myself am almost ashamed of them. I sometimes have in earlier days of my ministry prayed for a fine day because of the festival of the church or the outgoing of the little children or the excursion of the weary mothers ; and I have told God all this as if He knew nothing about it, and I have almost wished to stipulate with Him for a fine day for my little festival or excursion. If I have outlived the mere literalism of the thought, I have not outlived its spiritual significance and value. He has taught me now that if the day be the wettest that ever fell from the clouds, it is just the right day and the best for the occasion. Can I explain it now ? Far from it, but I have had so many instances that I am entitled to go back and draw upon my balance at the bank, and pay my immediate creditor and tell him that the God who has done so much for me in the way of explanation in the past is one day going to explain all this rain and turn every shower into a summer.

Observe, the people in question were " the children

of Israel." Character is implied; character is not only implied, it is recognised and held up as a lesson. They belong to a praying host, to a covenanted ancestry, they were involved in the baptism of an oath. Do not imagine that a man can leap out of atheism and begin to pray for some selfish purpose, and have his answer on the spot. Character determines prayer; the simple heart suggests the right petition; the sincere spirit, praying at the Cross and in the name of Christ, can alone pray with lasting and ennobling effect. In this respect there is something in heredity, there is something in the covenant, something in the eternal decree. We stand the last members up to this moment of a great ancestry of prayer; the oath we hold has been handed down from centuries, and it will not break in our hands if we be faithful, simple, true and most filial in our reverence and expectation. To-day we are receiving answers to prayers uttered it may be a thousand years ago. They tell me that but last night or any night there arrives light that started three thousand years ago, and the planet from which it started may have perished from its place in the heavens; who knows whether there is not some analogue, religious and deeply spiritual, in the fact that there may have arrived this morning a kiss from lips in heaven sent a thousand years ago? This is the harvest-time. O men! be more religious, intensely religious, supremely religious, as religion is understood in the life, the incarnation, the priesthood, the all-prevailing atonement of the Son of God.

It has been my custom for many years to insist that there is in reality only one prayer, and at the risk of tediousness I must repeat this most solemn conviction. We are at liberty, by the grace of God, to talk out of our hearts their inmost secrets of confession and desire. This is praying, but it is not prayer. I make a strong distinction between the two exercises. We may tell God all we want, and may even draw out a self-regarding series of prayers, for God does not put a restraint upon the fluency of our ignorance. We may tell Him what we desire about health, or weather, or fortune, or any complication of circumstances. But when we have done all this we have not entered into the holiest mystery of prayer, in fact we have not

prayed at all. We have been in our closet, we have shut the door, we have used the most emphatic religious language, and yet we may not have prayed. No man has prayed effectually, and within the laws of the divine kingdom, until he has said at the close of all his petitions, "Not my will, but Thine be done." Having said this, the soul has truly prayed; not only has it truly prayed, the soul has prayed the one prayer that God never denies. We must, by the grace of Christ, pray ourselves into harmony with the divine will. If we say this in the blighted harvest field, in the chamber of fatal sickness, at the graveside where the whole world is buried to us, we shall be more than conquerors, for we shall feel that it is God who is withering the corn, smiting the idol, impoverishing our resources, and working out in His own mysterious way the complete sanctification of the soul. God did not keep His Son from the cross. But God did not allow the cross to terminate either the personality or the influence of His Son. When God is leading our life, and we are in complete accord with the divine movement, the eyes of our soul may be so enlightened that we can see the resurrection beyond the cross, and green Olivet beyond mournful Calvary. It is in the heart of these inmost mysteries that we realise and test the true value of Christian faith. Oh the hardness of it all! Oh the darkness of the terrible valley, and the loneliness, and the coldness, and the changed air that once was full of health and fragrance; it is misery; black, cruel, agonising misery; but if we once feel that we have given up our will to the will of God and can trust the divine will without reserve or question, the morning has already dawned, and the gates of heaven welcome us to light and liberty.

PRAAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we thank Thee for all the hearts and minds that have understood Thy purpose in the redemption of man and in the setting up of Thy kingdom. Great and marvellous are Thy works ! who can find Thee out unto perfection ? there is no searching of Thine understanding. We bless Thee that now and again from age to age Thou hast raised up a man of wisdom and of a sound understanding ; Thou hast inspired an attention which can hear the sound of Thy going even amid the silences of time. We thank Thee for every prophet and minstrel and writer of sweet hymns and speaker of words that find the heart in its loneliness and utterest distress ; these are Thy prophets and messengers. This is Elias that should come and speak in fire, and this the apostle that should come and speak in whispers of love. These are Thy gifts ; we have killed some, we have stoned others, and we have set the mark of our contempt on the graves of many. God pity us wherein we did it in our ignorance, and hear the thrilling cry which appeals to Thee, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. We thank Thee for all ministers of grace, for all prophets gifted with insight and foresight, and for all the tongues that are eloquent with the wisdom of God. The Lord help us to listen well, to be reverent in His house, to expect His coming, and may our hearts bow themselves in reverence when the King of heaven draws nigh. We have gathered a few flowers of love and thankfulness which we have brought to Thine altar to-day, for we would remember the hand that has delivered us and the hand that has fed us all our life long. When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up ! has been the cry of believing orphanhood from century to century. When the heart is most desolate, God is nearest, and when we cry, Is there no balm in Gilead ? is there not a Physician there ? behold, whilst our cry is rending Thine heavens Thou dost bring the balm and the healing and the tender comfort, and Thou dost make us men once more. We bless Thee for all that has blessed us, for all the people who have companied with us awhile on the rough journey of life and have left behind lingering and tender music : if we bless Thee that they are gone, it is not for our sake, but for theirs, for there shall be no more crying, no more sorrow, no more death, neither shall there be any more pain ; they shall hunger no more. So we bless Thee for all Thy crowned ones, and we wear their memories as kings wear diadems, for Thou hast made us rich in treasured love and in memory that cannot fade. We pray Thee to look with eyes

of pity and love upon those who are left to struggle awhile, up another hill, through another gloomy valley, across another rough river, and then to-morrow, or to-morrow further on, there will be great rejoicing and salutation, forgetfulness of all sorrow, and participation in a common sacrament of joy. The Lord help us to live in the spirit of the Cross, inspire us by Thy Holy Spirit, Thou living One, and may our hearts be as outer flames burning up all evil and expressing in ardent zeal consecrated and indestructible love. We bring ourselves before Thee one by one; every heart has its own psalm, its own bitterness, its own cruel or joyous memory, and its own peculiar supplication; then we gather ourselves into a congregation, and, as the larger unit, would say, God be merciful to me a sinner! The Lord sprinkle us with the blood of atonement, the Lord send upon us the baptism of fire, the Lord have us in His holy keeping. And as for those who are men of war and cruelty and unrighteousness and shamelessness, we know how Thou hast dealt with them aforetime, Thou didst cast them as a stone into the depths of the sea.

The Lord hear us in our little song, and receive our little tribute of flower and thankfulness, and answer our petition of penitence and thanksgiving and expectation, seeing that we pray now as always in the name of the One Priest, to whom be the diadems of the universe! Amen.

XX.

THE MINISTRY OF INTERPRETATION.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 30TH, 1899.

"An interpreter, one among a thousand."—JOB xxxiii. 23.

"N interpreter," a man who will tell you how it is, and what it is, and how it came to pass, and what it means, with regard to the future as well as the present. "An interpreter"; the penetrating mind, the keen swift lightning reader who reads the blank lines as well as the full ones, and who knows what the lines would like to say if they could.

“An interpreter”; a dreamer, a poet, a man who hears the true rhyme and responds to the eternal rhythm and lives the solemn music. How many interpreters are there? Not many; but sufficient. “One among a thousand” the interpreter is; the one leads the nine hundred and ninety-nine: and we cannot alter it. We who are social carpenters and want to plane things down to a common smoothness are baffled by some mysterious and invincible agency. One man had a dream; he dreamed that he could make all men equal, and when he came to tell his dream he forgot it or mixed it up with some other dream, so that the whole thing fell into a weird nightmare, and nothing came of it. One imagined that every man was equally strong and wise with every other man; he thought this would delight the people when he told them his doctrine, and, lo! it was as a riddle to them, and the wiser of them turned away from him and said he knew not the sense of things. We had better take the situation as God has marked it out; there are nine hundred and ninety-nine men who know nothing about it, and there is one man divinely appointed who can explain what it is; we had better call for the prophet of the Lord that he may read the riddle to us in our mother tongue.

We shall always need a ministry of interpretation, a discriminating, highly intellectual, most penetrative ministry, that sees the little things as well as the great things, the coupling nexus, the filament, the plasm, the thing that is not yet a thing but will be a thing by-and-by in the out-throwing of all the purpose and issues of Divine providence. Nine hundred and ninety-nine of us therefore will do well to listen, to attend, to obey. Do you not believe that every man has as much right to think as every other man? Certainly! I believe that a barn-fowl has as much right to fly as an eagle; I do not say they are equal. There is no free thinking; the universe is a cage, and we are within its wires; blessed be God for occasional openings in the iron through which we can see flecks of blue and through which there may come to us snatches of song. It is very humiliating that there should be an interpreter unless I myself am the interpreter; such is the voice of delusion, the voice of

vanity. There have always been leaders, preachers, writers, poets, interpreters, teachers ; all are not such who are called such, but time will winnow them, and the heart will test them, and the false shall be cast out because unworthy and incapable.

You find the interpreter in all sections and grades of life. No man can interpret himself. We have often said no man has ever seen himself. He has held dialogues ; he the one man taking a side, and he the other man, the same man with a plus difference, taking the other side, and between them they have held colloquies about God and eternity. They are brave talkers these two ; they handle subjects as if they had a right to handle them ; maybe they have, for who can measure the stature of man or lay a line upon his capacity ? The body has its interpreter, why not the soul ? The body sends for its more or less qualified doctor ; the body listens to the doctor ; the body dare not rise up and say, I will not listen to you. The body is craven, is an instance of moral and almost pitiable humiliation, and is yet an example of what is due to learning and genius and capacity. So the body pays for its drugs, and the drug does not always answer the enigma of suffering ; but, as the people say, it is a consolation that the doctor has seen the case ; sometimes it is a consolation to us when higher doctors still have spoken to us about the distress and the tears and the misery of the soul ; sometimes it is a comfort to us to find in the morning that the pillow we had drenched in tears has been dried again by some invisible and beneficent visitor, nameless, mayhap, but God has nameless angels. Let the anonymous ministries work out their beneficent purposes.

And genius has its interpreter ; I mean the genius of history-making, the genius of character, statesmanship ; capability has its interpreter, and his name is the historian. Where is the historian of to-day ? Not born yet. But will a man to be born next century be able to interpret the century through which we are passing ? Yes, and infinitely better than we are. A most marvellous thing this, and much more marvellous to the person that has no Bible than to the person

who believes in Holy Scripture, that one age has to wait until some child is born who will have the gift of interpreting an age he did not live in, and explaining people whom he never saw! John Milton says, "One day there will be a resurrection of great names." Were they not understood in their own time? Far from it; the men who looked on were too near; we may be so near a mountain as not to see it; we may be so much involved in the intricacy and detail of the city as not to know the magnificence and the power of the very capital we live in. So in another age there will arise a man who will interpret the men we have murdered, and the next age will lavish its gold and silver upon marble and brass and monumental falsehood. It must be so. We cannot understand that which is so near us or that in which our prejudice or our interest may be involved; we must pass out of the way and let the interpreter come forward. Many a statesman, many a leader, will have to wait until the true interpreter comes who will set him in the right light and set another generation weeping over him, that same generation being prepared to kill its own prophets. But this is the way; it is a mystery, and the answer to it is not yet.

A single hearer is interpreted by the congregation. Persons say, Can we not read a good sermon at home? In a certain sense; that depends wholly upon the gift of the reader. Many men cannot read at all who can speak seven languages; they do not know what reading is, they have no gift of music, cadence, rhythm, pathos. Can we not worship at home? Yes, and only in a right sense in the degree in which the impulse was to seek the common prayer, the great congregational supplication, the liturgy of the total mind; the universe nursing the daisy, and the daisy proud and quiet because it is in the arms of such a nurse. A man may be interpreted to himself by the crowd; he may not know what fire there is in him until he comes into friction that touches the soul, inspires, rouses it; then the man is a surprise to himself.

"An interpreter," that is emphatically what the Bible is. The Bible is the interpreter of God; the

Bible has but one subject, all other subjects are cognate to it; they are, however, but collateral and minor; he only who keeps company with the apostles, the minstrels, and the prophets can really interpret God. The Bible is not a diffident book; the Bible seems to rise in majesty and in courage in the degree in which it tackles the greatest themes; give it God, and then you know what a book it is; let it speak of angels, and the air is balmy with their presence; let it discourse of sin and the great blood-redemption, and it separates itself from all other books and stands up in an appalling yet fascinating uniqueness. The Bible is the interpreter of man. No man, we have said, can interpret himself, but the Bible interprets every man to himself; the Bible holds the mirror up to nature, holds the mirror up to the man's secret heart, and gives him nightly and weird visions of his very innermost self, so that he says, I have seen the mirror, I abhor myself in dust and ashes. Beware of the strutting peacock that thinks he knows all about himself and all about human nature. God made man, and only He who made man understands man, and He has never spoken about man in any other tone than that man needs redemption, forgiveness, change of heart, sanctification.

We know nothing about destiny in its larger aspects and issues beyond what the Bible has told us. In this respect the Bible is both optimist and pessimist; both day and night are in the Bible forecast of destiny. We may wrangle about the words as we please, but there are no words so divine, so grand, so awful as these words, "The wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." You may issue many a volume about these words, but they are their own best treatise; they are not to be read off-hand, they are to be studied in quietness, read through tears, brought up into the highest music of the highest hymns; there they stand—life eternal, punishment everlasting. It is the Bible that undertakes thus to interpret destiny, and we cannot rid ourselves of the issue. We drink our vanity drunk, we steep it in all manner of intoxicants and poisons, and then drive away from us the everlasting punishment; but the words come back,

they have a message for us, they are rolled up in clouds of darkness, and when we have screamed our horror at them, still we have a ghostly feeling that it may be so.

The Bible is the best interpreter of God with which I am acquainted. It shirks no great subject, it invites the soul to the discussion of the highest themes, it is not afraid to go into the cemetery and interpret the graves into resurrections; it is an infinite succour and a most tender strength.

Experience is the best commentator on the Bible. Salvation is not of grammar or of criticism. The great discussions do not turn upon points of etymology, syntax, or prosody. Every man is an interpreter of the Bible if he has rich and deep and varied experience; he can make the Bible prove itself; he can say to the Bible, What is life? what is sorrow? what is solitude? what is bitterness? tell me, thou book of commerce, or I will tear thee and burn thee, tell me what is life? No book can talk to a man in that high mood so tenderly, so comprehensively, so sympathetically; the man is not then in a mood to be satisfied with the discussion of verbal points, he is in a mood which demands large and burning answers; these answers he can find only but sufficiently in the Bible. Do not mistake experience, do not think that experience is a series of personal anecdotes; experience in its larger aspects is a great tragedy mingled with a great joy. In the one room the old man is ill, in another room the mother is dying, and in a third room the little children are groping for the mother they will never see any more on earth; by-and-by some sweet-tongued woman or man will tell them that they will see the mother they are groping for in another place and in another image, but not with another love. The Bible thus is interpreted by experience. The learned man cannot take away my best passages from me; he has done his little best, he has altered a word here and a word there, and rearranged the vocables by a kind of expert magic, but I see through all these tricks, and away yonder, away in the heart of things, I see the meaning of God. There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understand-

ing ; there is a learning higher than learning, and a transliteration higher than the mere translation, pouring the Bible from grammar into grammar, and from language into language ; there is, so to say, a transmigration of soul, so that Moses and Elias of old time talk with Peter and James and John, of to-day. I believe in the transmigration of soul, the transmigration of the higher meaning, the clearer light, the more capacious and forceful energy. Never believe any man upon any subject who has not deep personal experience in relation to it. Mere intellectual expertness is becoming quite a nuisance ; we want the voice of the heart, especially upon those subjects which concern the heart, and to other voices we cannot listen.

Jesus is the interpreter of God. He gathered us round His knee, so to say, and told us that God's real name was Father. We said, Not like our father ? Yes, was the gracious reply, like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that love Him. But not like some fathers ? No, because some fathers are not fathers, they do despite to the genius of fatherhood ; they are brutes, ruffians, cruel, wicked persons ; to whom the name father ought never to be given ; but because there are these evil specimens of degenerate fatherhood the inner genius and spirit of fatherhood cannot be touched ; that fatherhood means tenderness, love, law, sympathy, the large righteousness which melts into tears or burns into blossom. There is no interpreter of God equal to the Son of God ; He was in the bosom of the Father, He was with God before there were any fountains abounding with water, He looked on while the foundations of the earth were being laid, and whilst the heavens were being arched and domed into their majestic and gleaming glory. He came from before the foundation of the world to redeem the world ; His blood was shed for man before there was a man to commit the sin for which the Saviour atones ; this mean versicle called time is less than a distich from the infinite poem of eternity and government and destiny. Go to Jesus with great questions, and you will get great answers. Interpret everything by your own heart so far as you are able to do so. Enter into the sanctuary of revelation just where it is to you most accessible. It may be a long

time before you are able to read some of the books of the Bible, but other people are able to read them; let them therefore who are the advanced scholars enter into sanctuaries whose portals fall back at their knocking. Some of us have to live quite near sweet Calvary; some of us have to listen to the Speaker when he is specially talking about sin and the possibility of pardon, and when he is offering all the blessings of restoration and completion. Some of us are just beginning to enter into the sanctuary of the Beatitudes: Blessed, blessed, blessed. He will bring in my case presently; go on, thou gracious Speaker. Blessed, blessed. Some of us can read the Chronicles or the Kings, or any of the grand historical books, and we do not feel just now that we need them, but there they are to be read in due time. You and I, let us enter the great sanctuary of God's love where the door stands widest open. In our Father's house there is bread enough and to spare.

We must be jealously on our guard lest we bring down the holy oracles to the limit of "private interpretation." There is a strong temptation for the soul to cut out little Bibles for itself. There is a danger, indeed, in specialising certain groups of texts so as to exclude the general teaching of divine inspiration. No man can be a great interpreter who does not take in the whole circuit and purpose of the context. There can be no harm in our regarding special passages as distinct messages to our own souls, yea, verily, as if God had audibly spoken them to us in our distress and solitude. We may know in what degree this is divinely meant if we consider whether we are putting away from us some other text that calls men to the noble endurance of loss and pain and darkness. The larger the interpretation the more sure is it to be according to the mind of God. The Word of the Lord is a large Word embracing all that is holy, sincere, sacrificial, and beneficent. We are not first to set up our own will and then interpret it by the will of God. The soul is sorely tempted to go on its own course and to constrain itself to see the finger of providence in the way which is most agreeable to its own selfish desires. We want to be called to larger honour or **fortune**, and when the opportunity

comes we are only too ready to regard that opportunity as a special creation intended for our enjoyment and satisfaction. We shall never be right until we interpret sacrifice as a divine election, and regard loss as the beginning of true gain. By the gate of discipline we enter into the paradise of rest. Be sure that God has forsaken us if He has kept trouble out of our way, and led us to fatten in pastures of self-gratification. "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations"—that is, divers trials, testings, privations, and interruptions of self-indulgence. When the true interpreter arises he will lead us away from the narrowness of the letter into the liberty of the spirit, and give us to feel that many texts which have been heavy as crosses have really held in their hearts the tenderest expression of the love and care of God.

PRAYER.

WE live in the pity of God ; because Thy compassions fail not we continue unto this day. Thy mercies are renewed every morning, therefore have we still a wall in Judah and a nail in Jerusalem. Thou hast not cut off our memorial nor destroyed the writing of our name in Thy book of covenants. We bless Thee that we have still hope in Thy pity, a compassionate Heart is still at the centre of things, we are not delivered over to judgment and controversy and wrath ; we stand and grow in the love of God. God is love. What manner of love hast Thou bestowed upon us that we should be called sons of God ? This is the miracle of Thy grace, this is the very conquest and triumph of the cross ; behold, we are washed unto cleanness, the crimson has all gone and the scarlet has disappeared, and the snow and the wool, Thine own miracle, have appeared, and we are clothed in the purity of God. Thou hast made great declarations unto Thy race, Thou hast not left Thyself without covenant, Thou hast proved the decree of Thy love ; Thou art working out daily and wondrously some gracious purpose of pity and redemption, of sympathy and deliverance : may we not meddle with God, may we rest quietly in the assurance that the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, and His way is in the great waters. Thou hast done wondrous things, yea marvellous things, on many a field of history and many a hearthstone of the family. Where Thou hast wrought in the nation Thou hast not forgotten the household, and the little child's cradle has drawn the attention of Thy love. We will continue, God permitting, to live in the Divine love, to abide in the Divine grace, and to nourish ourselves in the sunshine of Thy loving approbation. Thou dost smite man heavily, and behold he falls to the ground and is helpless ; Thou dost put the great axe of Thy wrath or Thy judgment or Thy misunderstood pity at the very root of the tree in which he trusted, and behold Thou hast cut down the tree. Many are mourning before Thee, mourning because of misery and utterest distress of mind because they cannot explain the Lord or follow Him in all the mysteriousness of His going. Behold, we have constructed our little plan, and Thou hast torn it to pieces ; we have made arrangements for our old age, for the quiet hour, for the sunset time, and just as our hand had finished the outline of the scheme, behold Thou didst burn it with fire, and it passed away from us as if in a laugh of bitterest contempt. One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at

ease and quiet ; another dieth in the bitterness of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure ; they lie down, and are not, until Thou dost revive them. We have no plea against God, we have no alternative against the infinite might of the Lord ; it is ours to submit and to bow down. Thou hast smitten all our forests, and our fields, and our gardens, and if the rye and the wheat have been spared it is because they have not yet grown strong enough for the plague to seize them. Behold, it is all wondrous, and a sad mystery, and a tragedy for which there are no words. Yet over all and through all there gleams the glory of the compassionate and redeeming cross ; and may we evermore see that light and turn our distress into gladness. Amen.

XXI.

THE COMPASSION OF CHRIST.

"But when He saw the multitude, He was moved with compassion on them."—MATT. ix. 36.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 23RD, 1899.



WHEN did He see the multitude ? He saw the multitudes before there were any multitudes to be seen : I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the First and the Last : I was with God before there were any fountains abounding with water. Christ is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Do not suppose that our Lord saw the multitudes for the first time when He came down to earth ; He came down to earth because He had already seen the multitudes ; God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life. We cut ourselves off from all the main currents and central forces of history if we think only of a Bethlehem Christ. We must think of the Everlasting Father, we must stand back in the sanctuary of eternity ; and in all these poor Bethlehems and Jerusalems and mean toy cities of the world we must see but so many accidents, so many transiencies, so many steaming vapours. How busy we are with

the atlas ! how forgetful we are of the revelation ! It is like man ; he made the atlas, it is a thing of his own painting, so he hugs it and values it and sets upon it plain figures of price ; it is not God's atlas ; God did not make atlases, geographies, small arrangements of dust, and distributions of so-called territory. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," all the mapping has been done by the pencil and the Indian ink, and the many colours of man's poor invention. Christ has no date ; like the creation of which He is the author, He comes up from the unbeginning beginning, the dateless date. Chaos has no history ; in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth ; poor chaos is not worth writing about, no one could write even an imaginary history of chaos ; darkness has no pedigree ; darkness built no monuments, wrote no inscriptions upon its own rocks ; it came and melted and went, and no man calls it back. Christianity began in eternity ; Christ can only be understood as He is looked at in the light of His own sanctuary, and at the altar of His own before-world throne. There is no true or complete history of Christianity. Men begin at a certain date, and they call that the beginning ; it is not within the genius of man to create any beginning. Poor man ! he must come in just where he can with his inkhorn and his pencil, and create to a large degree his own materials which he turns into what he calls history. We must get rid of words to understand words ; we must get into the immeasurable to understand the measurable ; history has an atmosphere, history stands in the midst of something, and that something is God.

When Jesus saw the multitudes, therefore, He was in eternity, in His own sanctuary of solitude ; He was a philanthropist before there was a man created to be pitied. God knew from all eternity that the finite must weep, the finite must suffer. There is an agony of disappointment, there is a sore, sharp pain which comes into the heart because we are so near some attainments. There is nothing between us but a very narrow river and the green Canaan of our dreaming love, and yet we cannot take that completing and consummating stride. So many graves are dug just six feet inside the object the living one aimed at, If

you had given him six weeks or six little months more time he would have finished the tower; if you had given her but a little more time she would have climbed the eminence from which are to be seen the towers and the pinnacles of the city of summer and the metropolis of rest. Poor thing! she was going to be married the year after next; she had already begun her little plans with that degree of secrecy which just permitted the most confidential communications to the most attentive of listening hearts; she was keeping a great secret of love with just one little corner turned back that any friend might see how really happy she was. Before the dawn of the consummating day she was dead, or he was dead, or some great stroke had suddenly fallen on the whole fortune of the trembling and sensitive life. God thus set up another mystery in providence, the great pillar broken off and uninscribed, not a word of explanation written on the shattered marble.

The compassion of Christ was from eternity, therefore it could take effect in time, and therefore it will continue to take effect until time's last sunset has glowed upon the world. It is eternity that gives explanation and completeness to the Atonement. We are apt to think that the Atonement took place at a time which could be dated; we discourse much about Friday night, and the whole Saturday in the grave, and the dawning of the first day of the week. It is all puerile; any comment dealing with these facts is a comment to be dispensed with; we live in God's eternal purpose, the Atonement was rendered before the sin was done; "before Abraham was I AM," and I AM has no time. If there is what we call time it is a mere accident, a pebble that rises on the river, shines, breaks, and disappears. Get away from the dates and limitations and so-called histories which are apt to be so many cunningly devised but unintentional lies, and rest thou on the bosom of God. Having redeemed the world, He is not going to allow His redemption to pass off without realisation and distinct claim on His own part. The world *is* redeemed; the world is a saved world, to-day it is reckoned among the stars. Blessed be God for the greathearts which have helped the

world to bear its misery. There were greathearts before Bunyan dreamed his lovely figure of tenderest benevolence and pity; Greatheart is one of the names of God. How much we owe to the greathearts that are amongst us! emblems and symbols of the truly Greatheart that has throbbled through all the pulsation of eternity. Many men are gifted in greatheartedness; they take the large view of things, they are not petty, superficial, narrow, censorious; they do not create a reputation for their own wisdom by dwelling elaborately upon the ignorance of other people; they leave the door ajar, believing that quite possibly the prodigal may come home before morning; they hear the minor tone of misery that breaks through the whole current of human music, and they say that even that minor tone will be ruled into a great harmony of resonance and completeness, and that one day there will be no misery. The greathearts are the poets of the race, the prophets of humanity, the people who can see over the grave and tell us that there is no such thing; people that see across the cut sod, the sod that was cut that we might find a resting-place for bodies that we love; and they tell us, with laugh holy and reverent, and song tender and tremulous, that there is no death and no grave, that right away in the short distance may be descried the city of the blest. We owe so much to the greathearts, the men and women of compassion, the people who are not severely critical, the geniuses who know when to shut their eyes that they may not see our frailties. There are men enough and women enough who can see faults and fluently remark upon them; we must not think of these, we must think of the others, the greathearts that would make us believe that God loves us still, and that His fire is meant not to consume the sinner but to burn the sin. Such greathearts are needed always in the Christian pulpit, that men may be cheered, encouraged, and lifted up, and told in a redeeming voice that they are not yet in hell.

Compassion is not sentiment, it is redemption. There is a sentiment no bigger than its own tear; there is another sentiment that signifies redemption, something done for the sinner. That was the redemp-

tion wrought out by Jesus Christ. He did not cry over men, He died for them. He did not say, It is a pity; He said, I will go down, and I will tread the winepress alone, and I will make suffering the way into the highest eminences and noblest sanctuaries of life and service. To Christ we owe the sentiment that completes itself in redemption. Away with your tears that have no depth! Welcome the love that would die for the prodigal!

What a view was that which Jesus Christ took of the multitudes! He saw the multitudes exactly as they were. It was a multitudinous misery, a multitudinous sin, a multitudinous helplessness. We see throngs, and remark on the number: Christ saw multitudes, and remarked on their misery. Alas! there is no gathering of human beings that does not represent a gathered pain, a gathered helplessness: where two or three are gathered together there is at least one broken heart. The street looks well, it is filled with bunting and with festoons, with spring flowers or summer grandeur; but in every house in that decorated street there is a broken heart. Jesus Christ did not see the bunting flying from the windows, He saw the hearts that were dying within the bosoms of human grief: He had compassion. We look upon the gay city, and say, How festive! Christ looks upon it, and says, How miserable! how uneasy! how pained at the heart! There are those who read things falsely, they do not understand the inner meaning and the furthest issue of events. A man will sit down in his own or friend's garden, and, gathering the flowers within his purview, he will say, It is a lovely world! What mean reasoning! what fallacious inference! What does this illogical man say? He sees a garden and remarks on a world!—just like the logic of folly; just like the people who want to make things better from the outside; just like the people who think that by a plaster on the skin the disease of the soul may be remedied. It is a beautiful garden, it is a miserable world:/only God Himself knows what the world is. It is not for you or me to comment upon the world; we stand upon spots, we see fractions, we do not realise totals; we must go to God to tell us what the world is, and He says the

world lieth in the wicked one, there is none righteous, no, not one; God so loved the world as to redeem it; He redeemed the world because He knew it. No creature on the face of the earth is entitled to speak upon the world or to dwell upon so complicated and vast a subject; we must go to revelation to know what the world is, and in the Bible the world is lost and helpless. That is the stand of the Christian faith; that is the outline of the Christian conception. Find a man who speaks about the world, and you find a man who speaks about what he does not understand, unless indeed he be speaking on the authority of revelation; then he speaks wisely and to the point.

How was it that Jesus Christ spoke to multitudes and spoke of multitudes? The answer is plain: Jesus Christ was not one of many, He was many in One; that is the explanation. Every man has his own last, every suitor has his own stool; there he may be a man of distinction, and of strong and useful faculty, but let him not move from his stool and speak about stars and planets and great magnitudes and dazzling lights. We are only wise in our statesmanship in the degree in which we are Biblical; we must go to God to know what the condition of the world is. That condition has been represented in Scripture in the most graphic and in the most awesome and appalling terms.

Jesus Christ would set His disciples to prayer; said He, "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He will send forth labourers into His harvest." This instruction goes further than it seems to go. There is nothing easier than for one Christian to pray that some other Christian man may become a missionary; that indeed might amount to an ingredient in an afternoon's enjoyment. We have been praying that God would send missionaries to China, India, Polynesia, and the far-away places of darkness: if the matter ends there your prayer might have been spared. Jesus Christ has a different object in view; He will presently reveal that object. The disciples fall to praying; they say, Lord, the harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few: send forth labourers into Thine harvest; raise up men who will go from the city into the places of ignorance and darkness

and superstition. That is called a missionary prayer ; it is, or may be, wasted breath. That is not God's way of doing things ; He wants men to pray themselves into their own amen, He wants to work up a prayer into its own answer. Until a prayer has worked itself up into its own reply it is a trick in words, it is an offering of mere verbiage, instead of the offering of a worthy sacrifice. No sooner had these poor unsuspecting men been praying the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth labourers into His harvest, no sooner, I say, have they risen from their knees, than Jesus called them to Him, and said, Go ! How some prayer-meetings to-day would be startled by that apostrophe ! They imagined that they had been doing wonders by praying that somebody else should go, and the Lord, having seen that they had prayed themselves into a meet spiritual mood, called them to Him, and said, Behold, I send you. Praying men must be missionaries ; the men who want the world to be evangelised must evangelise it, and no more hypocrisy ! I will send fire upon their miserable conceptions of missionary prayer-meetings and missioning by proxy and praying about the world's condition without doing anything worthy of the occasion. If you are perfectly sure that you could do better in some other way than in being a preacher or street evangelist or missionary, let us see what that something else is, if you please ! What ? We have had enough of talk and foam and proxy ; what is that other thing that you are going to do, you scamp, you Iscariot ? what is it ? And behold the Church is dumb with self-accusation. I do not say for a moment that a man cannot do much, very much, without himself going into the foreign field, but he must do that much in the spirit of the foreign field ; he must help missions in the spirit of missions. I encourage young men to become missionaries, evangelists, street-preachers, heralds of the kingdom. But my nineteenth-century young man wants so much coddling and equipment and patronage. Many young men ask me how to begin the ministry. I say, Begin it ! begin it now ! begin it as I began it under the grace of God and the compulsion of the Christ. Begin it in the street. There is the church ready, the roof on, the ventilation perfect !

PRAYER.

ALmighty GOD, we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, princes of darkness and rulers unseen. Oh that we might have fought with giants according to the body ! for then had our war been easy. Thou knowest the multitude of them that are against us ; Thou knowest the countlessness of the spiritual army. If God be for us who can be against us ? He that is with us is more than all that be with them who fight against light and truth and purity and love ; the battle is not yours, but God's. May we remember this when the day is going against us ; not our banners, but Thine, Lord of Hosts, go down when the enemy triumphs over goodness and truth and honour. Thou hast placed us in a fighting world, Thou hast called us to war ; may we put on the whole armour of God and stand clothed from head to foot in the panoply which Thou hast provided. The Lord help us to resist the devil that he may flee from us ; may we look upon our foes face to face, and in Thy power defy them. We bless Thee for the sanctuary, the place of rest, where the altar stands, the great Cross, and where is the blood of redemption and propitiation and atonement, the wondrous all-cleansing blood, unspeakable in preciousness. O cleanse us, and we shall be clean ! In our holiness may we find our might. We are only strong when we cling to His cross. Without Christ we can do nothing, but with Him we can do all things, and in all things succeed. Spirit of might, abide with us ! Wake us in the morning, and in the night time give us sleep. Lord Jesus, live in our broken hearts, and mercifully heal them all. Amen.

XXII.

GREAT GIANTS AND SMALL.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, MAY 4TH, 1899.

"Children of the giant" "a man of great stature" "these were born unto the giant in Gath."—I CHRON. XX. 4-8.



GIANT," "the son of a giant," "children of the giant," "a man of great stature." No doubt considered a very terrible war in the old time. Things change in their relations and magnitudes and importance. This is rough reading, but it is nothing to the tale we could tell. This was poor rude fighting, mere stone-throwing and body-thrusting; compared with the war in which we are engaged, it was a trifling pastime. There were giants in those days; there are giants in our day. There is nothing in all history so great as the history of the present; there is no moment of time so pregnant with the meaning of eternity as the moment of our present breathing. But relations change, they vary in significance as they vary in perspective. There is no old Testament in the sense of obsolete Testament, if we search into the spiritual meaning and purpose of things. The old Aaronic ritual is still going on, not in its mechanics, not in that wondrous apparatus of which we read whilst the Church was in the wilderness, but as to culture, diligence, daily sacrifice, eternal burning of the incense of a pure life; these things go on and will go on until the golden gates be opened, and the reason of the vision and the training, the discipline and the pain is made clear.

You tremble when you read the names of these giants. There is no need to tremble; a deadlier giant is aiming at your heart to-day. The heroics have changed as to apparatus and nomenclature and

environment, and all that sort of vanishing vapour; the great fight goes on, the tremendous rush of armies, Philistine and Israelite still meet face to face. And they can make no peace; they represent different worlds, different ideas, atmospheres, purposes, and they never can compromise; June cannot compromise with December; blossom and full flower of the early summer and the summer grown to its zenith height and glory, these cannot compromise with ice and snow and chilling, pitiless winter.

What giants have you been fighting? You have got through the first crude lot. I know it; so have we all. But it was a mere mob of blackguards; the hostility itself was vulgar, coarse, contemptible. The mischief is, lest having got through that mob of scoundrelism and villainy detestable and palpable, we think that therefore the fighting is done. The fighting never ends until the body is in the grave or is laid out on its last bed. You have killed the giant of Falsehood, you would not for the world be thought to be a liar; long ago you killed the giant Untruth, the black-faced giant Lies. But it does not therefore follow that you are now a true man, that you have escaped the lap and the shame of another falsehood, deeper, subtler, deadlier. Take care! You have overthrown the giant Dishonesty, there is no thief in your family. Take care! oh, take care! *Thou shalt not steal*—"That commandment have I kept from my youth up"; and in the King's name I stop thee and bid thee be less fluent. What is stealing? what is a thief? In the old time the robber despised the thief; a great distinction is drawn in the New Testament between thieves and robbers. Thieves were little, contemptible, mean apers of gigantic, majestic robbery. In the old time the robber would not speak to the thief. The thief stole pocket-handkerchiefs and trinkets, small coins of the realm; the robber seized provinces, kings, high game. He was not a handkerchief-stealer, he never made himself an object of special interest to what we call the police-court; he was a thief on a gigantic scale. The man who takes one life is hanged; the man who slays five hundred in war has the thanks of Parliament voted to him. You have overcome, with a shudder of shame, the

giant of Sensuality; that rough giant is dead, you are not the victims of debauchery; you attend lectures on purity, you do many curious things. Is there then no fighting to be done now? Do we say that there were giants in the old times, giants of the body and giants of wickedness? Let us make no mistake about the true meaning of old giants and archaic wars.

There is another set of giants to be encountered. What about the giant of Unbelief? You have worked down your mind, it may be, to a tottering old drunken man. He does not know in the morning whether it is evening or in the evening whether it is morning, and he is not sure how he stands in relation to old dogmas and ways of looking at things; he is being beaten down and crushed, pounded and pulverised, by a most mysterious power, of which the magistrate can take no account, called Unbelief. That is an invented word, that is an alien amongst words; it ought to be called upon to account for its being in our language; the brand of bastardy is on its face; it is a word of shame. But we are rather proud of fighting with the giant Unbelief, and showing thus how extremely intellectual we are. That we have even known the very existence of the word unbelief may show what marvellous giants of might we are. You have overcome all these giants. As for murder, you would not dream of it. There is something worse in your family, there is something worse in your heart. There is more said in the Bible against pride than against murder. And you are proud to be proud; you say, My mother was a very proud woman. If she is dead, do not repeat it, say nothing but good of the dead; if she is alive, be ashamed of it, and go and in God's grace convert the woman. People do not see how the Bible grows up into spirituality. There is one commandment which says, "Thou shalt not kill"; to that we instantaneously assent and consent. Certainly not, we say; kill! who would kill? is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing? Take care! The commandments do not stop with the seventh or with the eighth, where it took God Himself to write the words without blushing; the commandments go on to the ninth, "Thou shalt not covet." There spirit tackles spirit; there the Holy Ghost looks

face to face to the human soul; there the vulgarity of crime is lost sight of, and the spirituality of sin is recognised.

Not until we distinguish between crime and sin can we make any real progress in Gospel studies. Have you fought down and conquered the giant of Ingratitude? Who thinks about the spiritual sins? Who is not horrified by crime and draws its garments round it in attestation of its shocked refinement? There may be more sin in ingratitude than in some murders. The murder may have been done in hot blood, in haste to be repented of evermore, through ages eternal to be regretted and deplored as a lasting bruise of the soul. Ingratitude is slow, mean, deliberate, calculating, cruel; ingratitude may proceed by system, it means the most horrible of all neglect, it means death that swallows up the soul in some black pool. The giant of ingratitude takes a great deal of fighting. Let me pierce myself morning by morning with such interrogatories as, Are you ungrateful? have you been thankful? do you kiss the hand to which you owe so many benefits? do you seek to serve the cause of Him who redeemed you and to whom you owe every hair of your head and every breath of your body? have you forgotten God? I thought the day of war was over. No! not so long as there is one devil to be resisted, one evil desire to be quenched, one foul temptation to be repelled. Have you overthrown the giant of your Ambition? that sordid calculating ambition that always wishes to shoulder out some other man and get a foremost place in the race of life; that ambition which is the lie of appearances, which is the falsehood of fashions, which steals a livery that it may conceal its plebeianism. These are the wars, the fights of God, and the trumpet-blare is now rending the atmosphere, calling us to the war of God, the holy war.

The danger does not lie always along what may be called the line of giants. There are more difficult forces to contend with than the visibly and measurably gigantic. There is not a giant to fight every one of us, but there is a foe that every soul must know and confront and be thrown by or must overthrow.

You could shoot an evil beast, but an army could not overtake the Colorado beetle. There would be plenty of people who at other people's expense would go to distant countries to shoot big game. Poor fools! if they would pay their own waybill I would think a little less harshly of them. So many people are prepared for giants who are not prepared for beetles and bacilli and the germs that sow the air with death. Many persons would do heroic things who are only called upon to do little simple daily domestic things. There is many a young man in the City who would declare at a certain period in the process of dining that he would go through fire and water for his father and mother. The poor old folks do not want the foolish boy to go through fire and water; they would like him to drink less and to smoke less and to come home a little earlier at night. And yet he, beered and wineed into a state of degradation, wants to go through fire and water, both of which must be profoundly ashamed of him. Many persons are willing to do very heroic deeds. One friend would be very glad to build an orphanage that would accommodate a thousand orphans. Stop! begin with the one orphan that is at your door; that is your present scale of heroism; do not try to exaggerate it; if you would not keep the one little orphan I dare not trust you with the nine hundred and ninety-nine other orphans. If a man cannot keep one day in seven as a day of rest, religious and bodily; if a man cannot consecrate one day in seven to the Lord, I have little hope that he will consecrate the whole seven; if a man will not give one-tenth of his income to the altar, I shall have no faith in his loud heroics when he declares that all money belongs to God.

Are you fully aware that there are many assailants and enemies who are not giants by name, but are giants in influence, in obstinacy of purpose, in a cruel determination to ruin your soul? Have you calculated the force of little things? Read me the plagues of Egypt. Lions, tigers, elephants—is that how the story runs? Not a word of it. What were the plagues? Hardly anything bigger than a frog; the lice, the flies, the little things, these excited the alarms of Egypt, and brought Egypt to her knees. You and I

are not called upon to fight the giant of Gath or his son or the monster referred to in the text, but we are called upon to fight many insects, bacilli, germs of poison, things that require a microscope to discover, so minute as to be to the naked eye actually invisible, and yet on the tip of your finger you may have as many of them as would people any city in Europe as to mere number. To that fight we are called! the fight of spirit with spirit, soul with influence. A tremendous battle is ours! Do you suppose that an eagle fears any foes? Think of those pinions of steel, those eyes of fire, that beak of brass. And yet the eagle is maddened to death by a humming-bird no bigger than the joint of a finger. The humming-bird, according to the naturalists, fastens itself on the neck of the eagle; no pinions can strike it, no beak can get at it, no strength can approach it; there the little tormentor sits and works the ruin of the eagle. O men, great grand men—sweet women, beautiful with the beauty of God, in many respects you are not being ruined by giants and great irruptions of alien armies, but by some little miserable contemptible sin, habit, meanness, fault of character. You look well, but you are being eaten up by the insect temptation, the little mean temptation for which there are no words; so grand a man as you tormented to death by some microscopical devil; it may be some love of fashion, some occasional but hateful desire, some habit that gradually obtains and secures the mastery of the soul. To see a great man overthrown by a habit—oh the pity of it! oh the sorrow!

We have often told of the insect in certain countries that eats away all the woodwork of the door and leaves nothing but a coat of paint, so that going to the door and endeavouring to open it, it falls to pieces under the slightest pressure. That is translated into the life of to-day and into the life of every day. The paint is right, the externalism is beyond criticism, all seems to be well; but take care, for the white ant has eaten up all the interior character, and nothing is left but some flake of paint. You have read the wonderful travels of Livingstone; the great missionary traveller tells of the tsetse fly; it is a stinging winged insect. There is the noble ox, a

symbol of things strong and massive ; Livingstone says that the tsetse fly will light upon that ox, puncture the shining skin of the unsuspecting and undefended beast, and to-morrow and the next day and the next, and a week hence and that noble quadruped will have sunk upon the ground a mass of putrid flesh. These are the giants we have to fear, when morally defined and understood. We are not called upon to fight with fire and water and great hordes and rabbles of enemies and shocking vulgarities of incarnation, but we are called upon to fight the tsetse fly, the stinging insect that punctures the character, and little by little the poison penetrates the whole tissue and outgo of the character, and he who may have been a prince in the house of God is there a foul carcase on the roadside that no dog would attempt to devour. How are the mighty fallen ! how is the fine gold become dim !

We have to fight these things in various forms, but principally I think to-day in the forms of books and tracts and publications. It is for that reason that I have a special interest in the noble work of the Religious Tract Society. That Society exists to do good ; it has its commercial as well as its benevolent, and its benevolent as well as its commercial, aspects. It is not a society of the home only, it is a great missionary society ; it has made its mark in well-nigh every quarter of the world. It has given grants, aided libraries, inaugurated evangelistic movements ; it has been educational and stimulative in a very high and noble degree. Within a few days or hours it celebrates its hundredth anniversary. I thank God that I was once a tract distributor, so to say an agent of this very Society. I do not know how boys spend their Sunday afternoon now, but I had a pleasant Sunday afternoon when I was a boy, and the pleasant afternoon took the form of calling at house after house and exchanging one tract for another. Poor boy ! it would have been better to have been bicycling, it would have been better to have been attending an at-home. No ! And I hope there are still boys who are enthusiastic enough in their religious convictions to go into poor streets and call at poor houses, and exchange gratuitously tract for tract. We have to fight

the giant or the insect, it may be both, of a pernicious and disastrous and devastating literature. You must look after your books, you must know what books you are sending out; you must not keep an open fountain of poison in your own drawing-room. England ought to have a grand daily religious newspaper. I have often said that the capital of Christian England should buy up the public-houses and abolish them; the capital of Christian England should make itself felt in Christian literature, in a journalism that is not a betting saloon, in a journalism that speaks for truth and righteousness in the face of falsehood and irreligiousness. But I will speak plainly to you. Christian England would not support such a daily journal. Christian England sneakingly loves its sporting paper, and if it is published on a Sunday what matter, provided it can be bought stealthily and read without its being apparently perused. You are not in earnest! You want fire, you are cowards! Oh, dash the cup of sacrament from your lips, but do not take it and then blaspheme by evil ways the Lord whom you nominally memorialise! We must have sincerity, reality, frankness; we must not be afraid of singularity, we must not be afraid of being just what we are. The love of appearances is the insect that is eating up some people; the fear of eccentricity is leading others in an evil but a fashionable way. Men have no convictions now. I am speaking not of those who can honestly contravene this statement, but of the great bulk of people who really have no sincere, enthusiastic convictions regarding Christ, His Cross, His hatred of sin, His standard of judgment, and His rule of destiny. We cannot much longer live in this poor way; the church is being honeycombed, the sanctuary is being deserted, the Bible is not being cut in pieces with a penknife as in the olden time of Jeremiah, but it is being neglected, laid aside, that something else may take its place; it is being ousted, out-shouldered, forgotten; and if we do not bring it back to its original place, the atheist will not, the carnalist will not, the selfish gambler will not. The Book appeals to us. If we are not true to *the* Book we cannot be true to the books that belong to it. The Religious Tract Society is a multiplied Bible, an annotated, edited, illustrated Bible. The greatest of all

our societies is the British and Foreign Bible Society. That is the root and, so to say, the mother of them all; that society must be kept up with abundant recognition and grateful patronage. We must maintain the integrity and extend the influence of the Word of God. The Religious Tract Society stands next, hardly next, it is almost identical. It is unsectarian, benevolent, evangelistic, missionary, and I want us to-day to give every penny that is above the ordinary weekly offering to the funds of this great Society, and thus have our little share in the celebration of its centenary. I love to think that many Christian institutions are quite a century old. Why, if I may be personal for one moment, if I may become a fool in glorying, I would remind some of our friends that the church assembling under this roof has been in the City of London 250 years; and it cannot be put down.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, Thou didst come down upon Sinai and speak the Ten Words to those who were Thy people, and through them to all days, all suns. We bless Thee that Sinai is still with us ; Thou hast talked to Thy people in great words, Thou hast spoken to them in mountains and in seas, and in great forests and in masses of affrighted rock. These are Thy syllables, these Thy words, Thou who didst create all things. We thank Thee for the Commandments, as we thank Thee for the rocks ; we bless Thee for Thy good statutes and Thy good ordinances, as we bless Thee for the lights of heaven ; may we make no laws of our own that are not consistent with Thy law ; may Thy law be our lamp and light and guide, and our sanctuary of rest. Thou hast come down to us on Mount Calvary, Thou hast spoken to us the infinite word of love that holds all other words and all other songs ; Thou hast spoken to Thy people in blood, in sacrifice, in incarnation, in redemption, in all the mysteries of the Christian idea. These are Thy mightier thunders, these Thy nobler words ; may we listen to Thy whispered love, may we hear the utterance of Thy covenant which Thou wouldst make with the human heart, and may we respond through the Cross to all the overtures and pleadings of Thine ineffable love. Teach us that we know nothing until we know God ; teach us that we cannot know God except through Jesus Christ His Son, the one Priest of the universe, the incarnate Love. To that Priest we ever come ; He is our great High Priest ; He is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by Him, seeing that He ever liveth to make intercession for us. We live in His prayer, His mediation is our plea and our hope. We bless Thee for every bright morning, and we bless Thee for young life, and for all things hopeful and tuneful : one day we may be able to bless Thee for the morning of darkness and storm and tumult ; not yet is our faith ready for this greater sacrifice. Thou dost try us with severe trials, Thou dost drive us to despair, and yet Thou dost save us at the last moment ; Thou dost scorch us until we know that Thou art cruel, and Thou dost heal us until we are sure that Thou art loving. Thou wilt not suffer us to be tempted with any temptations that we are not able to bear. Thou knowest how heavy the burden is, how sharp the penetrating blade, how difficult the daily task · Thou wilt not deliver us over to the

bondage of despair, for Thou hast not withheld Thine own Son, and if Thou hast not kept Him back from us but hast freely delivered Him up for us all, how much more wilt Thou with Him freely give us all things. Oh the struggle of it all, the terrible encounter, the faces that make the air hideous, the noises that affright the night, the cruel fangs that pierce the heart! Yet Thou hast told us that in it all there is meaning, and from many a mountain top Thou wilt interpret Thyself and make us glad we have ever known Thee. Lord, how long? Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly! Without interpretation we die. Lord, send the interpreting light and the interpreting music. Amen.

XXIII.

SEEDLING PARABLES.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, MAY 7TH, 1899.

"As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth even for ever."—PSALM cxxv. 2.



HERE do the parables occur? The instantaneous answer will be, The parables occur in the New Testament. The parables occurred before the New Testament was thought of by man. The parables are perhaps the oldest literature. There are in the Old Testament two or three somewhat elaborate parables; to them I do not now refer; my reference rather is to what may be called the seedling parables of the Old Testament. The Old Testament is great in seeds; the first chapter of the Bible is a seed chapter: God gave trees and plants and flowers and divers growths after their kind in their seed, in their germinal beginnings. It is just the same with these seedling parables. The Old Testament is full of seedling similitudes, little germs that you may grow into full parables. O how rich you might be! If you could follow that word *as* you would find that you were on the scent of all the

parables. Sometimes that little two-lettered word *as* is itself a parable. To the open eyes there is a picture in it; presently you will find a corresponding and completing *so*. The *so* gives the bigger meaning of the *as*, lifts it up mountains high, and lets it see how much bigger the landscape is than it ever thought it to be whilst it was throbbing and panting in the valley.

Do any seedling parables occur to you, so to say, on the spur of the moment? You could easily find some. "As an eagle stirreth": there is a parable; you can see it; God has made you a visualist; not a seer mayhap who reads the unwritten word, but a visualist who sees the meaning of everything that is going on, and of every little scrap of moss that tries dimly to tell how old the rock is.

"As a father": there is a parable; you see it all,—the house, the old man, the suffering child, the runagate, the absentee-heart returning, wondering, hoping, half praying; you see it all. That is the eternal parable of mercy, of heartbreak expectancy; forgiveness ready to be exercised; that the picture that should fascinate when all man-made academies have withered into forgetfulness.

"As Mount Zion." You could interpret a mount; it must be great, lofty, contemptuous in its dignity or condescending; the greater the mountain the more condescending, for it has been nearer, apparently, the sun, and has caught morning kisses of the returning light. God speaks to you in mountains, not in some little dust-syllables, but often in great heights, sublimest immeasurablenesses. "As high as the heaven is above the earth": a parable that has no words, it can only be uttered in constellations and punctuated with millenniums. Oh that men were wise! that they understood these things!

"I have likened the daughter of Zion to a comely and delicate woman": there is a parable. We have had the eagle, the father, the mountain, now the comely and delicate woman. We need them all; there is not one single image too many in all the symbolism and parabolism of holy writ and holy speech. Have you

seen my king? No; what is he like? Like? his countenance is as Lebanon. I saw him! who could miss the face of Lebanon? Have you seen my sweetest one? What is the image of thy sweetest one? "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood." I saw that blushing beauty, flushed with colour, red, white, many coloured; a tree not to be mistaken; I saw it; to have missed such beauty was to have been born blind.

The parables are very short, just a word, a hint, a sort of uplifted index finger, as who should say, You will find the picture in this direction, or in that. Blessed is he who has the inner vision, who can see the parable before it is a parable, who can read films into substances, plasm into universes. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; if we companied more tenderly and constantly with the Lord we should never be really lonely and never be really poor. Any man who has one little hot cinder in his grate has parables if he can read them. God writes in fire; God is flame. "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem": it is well to have the parable on the spot, to carry your object lesson with you, to be able to say, I am the bread of life, I am the true bread sent down from heaven, I myself have seen the Lord; I was blind, but now I see. Well to be the living parable. To that high election and ministry God has called us.

Surely these mountains have great meanings. They are much too big to mean nothing. The sky is the beginning of June; that sky could not be there if there were not something bigger above it. If all our little throbbing, broken-hearted life ended at the grave, it would be such a waste of space as to convict any deity not only of cruelty, but of incapacity. What is all that blue space for? Why those dangling star lamps, why the flames that burn in the crown of night? Space is theological; infinity is a moral or spiritual parable: as the sky . . . so the hospitality of God. These mountains are capital letters of history, and they may be the aristocracy of the landscape. Let us walk within a marvellous panorama of mountains, not that we care for them except as they

typify something better than themselves, but a great man and a great minstrel has chosen the mountains as parables of the security of the Church. Let us follow him for a few moments round his mountain proofs and mountain illustrations.

Have you ever seen a mountain? Most of you have; some have not, though they have stood upon the tops of a dozen. Some people gape and wonder too much to see anything. Let me speak to the wise, to the man who feels that to ascend a mountain is to climb an altar. Let us distribute the mountains as we please; we are not studying geography, but moral similitude.

What mountain is that away yonder down among the shadows of a cloudy morning? I know that mountain well, I have climbed it, I am on the top of it at this moment; the name of the mountain is Moriah. It stands for sacrifice, for life at its cruellest point of agony, for endurance that may at any moment totter into atheism. Is that one of God's mountains? Yes, in very deed; He watches it, He knows every blade of grass upon it; He keeps His gentle eyes upon every bent pilgrim that climbs the grim height; He preaches over it this gospel: I will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, I will let you bind sacrifice and take the knife out of your girdle and hold it high up in the air, and I will paralyse the arm that would strike. A poor landscape that has no mount of suffering in it,—merely decorated mud. Your life is not worth having if it knows not the thunder and the lightning and the desolation of total loss. Let God watch Moriah. If His heart beat more tenderly for one mountain than for another, it must be for that Moriah where human faith won by the grace of God its supreme and all-completing miracle.

What stony fortress-like mountain is that on which my eyes are now fixed? There is no garden-land on its bleak sides, no fair grass amongst such rocks. I know it well, it is called Mount Sinai, the mount of law, the mount of obedience, the mount that tries the muscle of the climber; God's mount, where He built the tabernacle of the morning and condensed the

universe of spiritual thought and purpose into one ten-worded Law. A landscape without a law-mountain would be a very loose property, it would indeed be a most miserable and disappointing freehold. Law is security, law means justice, and justice means educated, controlled, and sanctified liberty. No man can climb the gentler mountains with any real profitableness of soul until he has been well schooled on Sinai.

These are severe hills: Moriah red with blood; Sinai severe, morose with discipline. Hast thou no fairer hill? I see one that glitters like the gathered diamonds of creation. What mountain is that? Hermon. Hermon's dew is fixed, every drop a jewel, every look a flash, every contact a baptism. I love these lowlier mountains. But we cannot enjoy Hermon until we have suffered on Moriah, and we cannot enjoy the dew until we have accepted the law. Beware of wantonness, beware of the liberty which is licentiousness; if we obey, we shall not miss our cup of morning dew. We cannot have the dew unless we have the obedience. If we obey God, He will keep back nothing from us that is good for our souls, but there must be suffering, and there must be law or obedience. What say you? Do not change God's geography, do not write a waybook of your own; the whole wilderness-life has been mapped out, and the whole city-life; ask God for the guide-book, with the accompanying maps, and every morning say, Lord, what is the course for to-day? Sometimes we say, This is Moriah day, or this is Sinai day, or this is Hermon day: no matter, let Him decide; it is my business to obey; I did not make the mountains; if God bids me climb the severest of them, He will find the staircase up which I may go to see the meaning of the summit.

I think I hear voices on this other mountain, strange, weird, penetrating voices, and yet rich, solemn, meaningful voices. What are the names of the speakers? There are three of them—Moses and Elias and Jesus. What is the subject of that weird discourse? The decessus, the exodus, the outgoing, which Jesus shall accomplish at

Jerusalem ; the greater Moses leads the larger host to a grander Canaan. I love these mountains that have voices, I mean human voices, I love to hear my mother tongue in unexpected places ; I do not feel so lonely on the mountain now that I have heard words that I can understand in my innermost heart : Lord, it is good to be here ; this mountain is like home, why should we leave it ? Who would willingly turn his back on the sunshine and on the music and on the opening portal of heaven ? Lord, let us build. What ! split up the rocks into huts ? Never ! the rock is a building if thou hadst but eyes to see the sanctuary.

There seems to be but one man on another mountain that I see in the hazy distance, and I think I know that man. What is his name ? tell me if thou knowest. His name is Moses, and the name of the mountain is Nebo, and the meaning of the parable is vision, anticipation, widening liberty, horizon beyond horizon. How poor my landscape would be but for this Nebo ! I stand upon it every morning and say, One day nearer ! to blow a kiss of the heart across the separating chasm to lips that wait beyond ; to see a fairer gleam than I have ever seen on earth ; and to hear angel birds, the lays and the trills and the soft gurgles of music ; all the romance of the dew turned into music-notes, all Sinai's law turned into liberty, all Moriah's acting translated into victory and immortality. Let us ask God to take us up Mount Nebo, a little distance, at all events, every day ; we may not be able to climb to the very top, but there is a view from every resting-place on that wondrous hill. Do not let us remain there, but return to work in the valleys in the spirit which has inspired us on the mountains.

And then we shall come to Olivet, a mere stepping-stone, beauteous Olivet, vernal Olivet, and it is but a step and a cloud and a crowning. Are our lives mountain girded ? Have we great hills as our securities given to us by the living God ? Can we say exultantly, I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills whence cometh mine help ; my help cometh from the Lord of Hosts ? Then we shall be as a mountain-girdled Jerusalem, secure ;

that is, without care; the literal meaning of secure, care-less, because at peace. We must climb the mountains if we would get a proper idea of distance, magnitude, perspective, colour, and the like. You cannot see anything until you stand back from it, and you really cannot see the landscape until you get away upon the solitary mountain, and then see how it lies and how its rain-waters are distributed, and how the smoke curls from thronged city and lonely hamlet. Moses went up into the mountain; Christ went up into the mountain apart to pray.

There is the greatest mount of all, Mount Calvary—a self-destructive word, for Calvary is no mountain, and there is no place called Calvary. Better so! I would God the Holy Land were submerged rather than it should be vulgarised and desecrated and pounded into dishonest cash. It is better that there should be no mountain, but a general plain belonging to everybody; little children who cannot climb and lame people who can only be carried here to breathe the balmy air. And there is no place called Calvary. There is a place called Golgotha, a place of a skull. Better that it should be left indefinite and vague. We do not want a localised redemption, a parochial atonement. Better that some definitions and boundaries should be blotted out and thrown into the mysterious totality of things, than that they should be bounded and fenced and turned into private grounds. The Bible is every man's book. Error hates the Bible; the false priest would steal the Bible; all ignorance is afraid of the mother tongue; all falsehood, deceit, cunning would keep the people back from the infinite charter of the right to read God's book. And yet Calvary is the greatest of the mountains, the greatest of the heights if we idealise it and think of it in the diviner and sublimer poetry. It lifts itself up above our sin; it lifts itself up above the sun; it is the great height to which the intellect is invited and the imagination and all the higher powers of the soul. Not a geographical mount, but an ideal mountain, infinite, not coming up out of the earth, but descending from God out of heaven and settling like a welcome on the face of the earth it would redeem. Do not be taking so much care of yourselves; do not be

imagining that you have to build your own securities and arrange your own protections. As the mountains, so are the securities of the people of God. The foundation of the Lord standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. Sooner shall the mountains depart and the hills vanish of deliberate contemptuous purpose than God's word shall depart from us, or God's promise be but a vibration stealing away into nothingness and disappointment. Bind this text on the heart, regard it as a precious jewel, count it amongst the riches never to be parted with : As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people. And out of the mountains Jesus will weave you or paint you a parable every day. He is the Artist who never tires.

Thus we come back and back again upon the sacred and animating thought that all life is a wondrous mosaic of symbol and parable, or silent sermon. There is nothing beautiful that is not full of the colour and dew of the heavenly garden ; and there is nothing common or plain that may not by faith be turned to sacramental uses, as was turned the bread at the Supper, and the wine which was made to signify redeeming blood. We often speak of seeing the humorous aspect of things and making life light and pleasant by taking such view of it as will enable us to see the face of laughter where otherwise we might see the face of mourning. I prefer to see the symbolical aspect of nature, of life, of events. Facts come to us in the first instance in the form of parables—things not to be taken literally, but to be idealised, to become the roots of expectation, or the dawning lights of a new morning. We do not always see the parable as we are passing through it, not until old age may we see how the whole day has been shaped into a gospel of providence. It may be that parts of the parable of life will have to be interpreted and set in place after we have passed through the golden gates, and seen the life of earth from the heights of heaven. Earth is the place of parable rather than of explanation. The Author of the parable is God ; He knows that we could not bear the prose of hard labour, or of harder sorrow, so He sends many a parabolical colour upon our life, many a glancing light, many a cooling

shadow, and sometimes we have to go into the house and ask Him privately the meaning of the pregnant words which He spoke unto us in picture and trope. There is not a valley in all the rough wilderness which God cannot exalt, nor is there a rough place which He cannot make plain. A strange life is this life of the wilderness—cradles and coffins, homes and graves, the wedding bells striking their music through the tolling knell; the old man dying and the little child coming to take his place—oh, it is all so wonderful, so bewildering, and so calculated to chasten the mind and heart of men. I pray God that I may be enabled to read the parable of life with a clear eye and an appreciative mind. My difficulty is not to interrupt the great Parabolist, that I may seek from Him an explanation of the immediate present. He will not endure such interruption. He will not allow me to speak until He has completed His parable, and when it is completed probably I am unable to speak because of my rising wonder and delighted thankfulness.

I will go through life asking the mountain to tell me its parable; asking the river to explain whence it came and whither it goeth; inviting the birds to interpret their own songs to my weary and aching heart; I will even ask the silence to interpret its dumbness and to give me assurance that it will one day rise into song; I will ask all the vacancies and absences of life to assure me that they are but temporary, and that by and by, possibly quite soon, I shall re-enter broken fellowships and forget momentary severances in the unions of completed providences, and in the songs of chastened praise.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, Thou art always calling us to marriage and feast and rest and satisfaction and heaven. Behold, it is a gospel that is singing in our ears, an evangel of hope and love, of pardon and completest joy. Thou hast filled the air with this music, the wind is balmy with fragrance not emitted from flowers of earth ; there is something round about us we have not seen and that we cannot comprehend, a strange weird ministry, a half-presence and whispered music and broken tone, and yet in it all and through it all we are sure of the nearness of heaven. Do the white ones ever come near us in this poor pilgrim life? Have they any controlling power over the air, or is it wholly the princedom of the devil? Surely Thou who didst make the spring and the summer and the ruddy autumn, surely Thou hast sent through these cold days of earth and time some odour of heaven, some music of mercy. We come to the marriage now, we are bidden guests ; Thou hast made the marriage ready, and what Thou doest who can tell? We can number Thy stars, we cannot count Thy mercies. Behold us in our littleness, and pity us ; behold us at the Cross, and forgive us ; look upon our wasting manhood, and tell us about immortality. Amen.

XXIV.

MAKING LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, MAY 11TH, 18

"But they made light of it."—MATTHEW xxii. 5.



H the fools ! and their progeny is innumerable. They made light of invitations and chances and openings and great opportunities. They wasted the light, they closed their ears to the music ; they turned life into a frivolity. How the parables themselves are changed lately ! These parables in Matthew xxii. are not like the parables we read in Matthew xiii. What has come over the wondrous Speaker ? We never saw that face before ; this is a totally new tone, and it seems hardly to fit those gracious lips. Some little time ago the parables were all pictures of beauty, works of art in flowers, beautiful things in precious stones ; they were welcomes and little songs and dreams half-told, but rich with promise. The same Speaker comes before us, and yet He is not the same ; we did not think He could speak in thunderbolts ; we knew He could speak delightfully in lilies and roses and little children and pearls and growing things and signs of harvest. But lately He has taken to quite another tone ; He who spake in flowers speaks in thunder ; He who spake of the kingdom of grace and love speaks of judgment and doom and darkness everlasting and a horrible fate for sundry characters. What has changed Him ? Nothing ; this is a natural sequence and development of things. The parable is still a picture, though the painting is all fire, and the subject of the parable is still a kingdom. Jesus never lets the theme down ; He lifts other themes up to its infinite altitude, but itself He never degrades. What a lesson for the poorer preachers such as we are, never to let the theme go down, but to bring other themes up to it ; always to preach a Cross as if it were a kingdom—and the King shall come, and the King shall do this.

The kingdom never subdues its glory. You cannot make up for the parables by little anecdotes of your own invention. Why do you take to this anecdote-mongering? Is it to waste the time, or what? Why, the parables are a million thick; you can find them in every field white with dew, in every garden blushing with flowers, and in all the incidents that are taking place around us night and day. When will we get back to the New Testament? When will we get back to the text and to the context and to God's meaning in the whole evolution and application of it? Jesus now speaks a parable of judgment. He had invited a great number of people to a marriage feast, a dinner; all things were ready, oxen and fatlings were steaming on the abundant table, but the guests were not there, and the message was sent forth for them to come in; for all things are ready. The kingdom always has a reason. "All things" are ready. That is the rock truth; the rest you will find to be sweet flowers and times of holy revel.

"But they made light of it." They made nothing of the grand chance. How could they make anything of it? Their characters are here described. If their characters or occupation or engagement had not been referred to we might have invented reasons for this frivolity; but the reason of the frivolity is given in the parable itself. These were prosperous men; they had married wives and bought oxen and entered into merchandise and possessed themselves of large farms. These people had never needed a gospel; that is to say, they had never been sensible of their need of it. A prosperous man, as the world counts prosperous, does not want the Gospel. He could not understand it if he heard it, it would be an alien tongue; only the broken-hearted can listen to the Gospel; only the bereaved catch the word resurrection as if it were a revelation; only those who have been desolated and orphaned and smitten in two can detect a possible hope in such sweet words as the Gospel gives. The fat beast needs no organ or trumpet or banner or promise or sacramental love; he lives beneath the Gospel, away from the great offer made in blood.

Let us beware of frivolity. Frivolity always means

ruin; frivolity, being translated, means loss. It does not seem to be such whilst the fool's laugh is rending the troubled air. The fool sometimes seem to have it all his own way; he drinks to some cousin fool or some brother fool, and all the air seems to be distilled into an intoxicating champagne. To preach the Gospel there under such circumstances, in such an environment, why, that would be worse than brawling in church. O thou mighty Pauline soul, thou wouldst not be allowed to preach across the reeking wine to those who have steeped their brain in the intoxicating fluid. It is always so; the Gospel cannot get at unsanctified wealth or unsanctified prosperity. "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance; they that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick": and a man must be sick, yea, consciously dying, before he can really and with edification welcome the Physician of souls.

Is this frivolity, destruction, or ruin only in Gospel things? No; frivolity is ruin everywhere. That is the great plea of the Christian Gospel; it says, Fools, hear me; you are not only wasting me, you are wasting life. The frivolous man is not only wasting his chance of heaven, he is wasting his own business; that is how the Gospel has such a determining and beneficent hold over men. It is so strong in reason, so tremendous in experience; it gets so squarely down upon the soul as to make the soul feel that the Gospel appeal is right. No frivolous man would be entrusted with your business; his untimely laughter would disturb your confidence; you would naturally say that a man so frivolous could not be earnest about anything; and that feeling of yours, so naturally justifiable, would go further and express itself in suspicion and in distrust, and finally in abandonment of the man's service. It is the same all through and through life. Frivolity ruins your enjoyment of nature. The fool has no pleasure in a garden. Do not be distressed, minister of the Gospel, because the frivolous man has left your ministry; he leaves the garden as well as the church, he leaves all beauty as well as all truth; and if he hold on to music it is of the rougher sort, debased and vulgarised and dethroned. Beware of frivolity. The rose shrinks when the

frivolous man touches it, and every little flower in the garden shakes when the frivolous man approaches the flower-bed. He does not understand that parable of flower and colour and fragrance, and a gospel expressed in effluences so delicate and so delightful to the sensitive nostril.

Frivolity works its own ruin in friendship. The fool has a little hour, an hour with fewer than sixty minutes in it—just a poor paltry little group of minutes. Sometimes he laughs so as to impose upon the unwary and to lead them to suppose that he is in high mood of merriment and joy. He is not; only wisdom can truly laugh, only solemnity can be really merry, only in the church can we hold divinest revel. I will not have it that the devil has the feast, and God the empty table; frivolity, I repeat, ruins friendship. We do not always want the giggle and the laugh and the foolish jest. Sometimes you want silence—the unworkable miracle of folly; sometimes you want the masonic grip that says to you in its gentle crush, I am the resurrection and the life. Sometimes you want a deep wise word that goes right to the very heart and condition of things, and gives you the word of liberation and opportunity and conscious release from darkness and heavy weight. Then the wise man will have his turn, then the Gospel will have its holy opportunity. Wisdom can wait. Wisdom watches the opening of the gate, and says, It is time now to go in; or, It is not yet time to attack the portal, for it is bolted and locked on the inner side. But the waiter is Christ; His other name is Patience; the midnight dews cannot drench the love out of Him, and all the rebuff and rebellion of the soul only makes Him as it were sevenfold more the gentle, patient, winsome, all-redeeming Son of God.

Ministers must not be discouraged because many persons nowadays make light of the Gospel. The Church of Christ in all its sections and communions is now supposedly going out of favour. Ministers are sometimes made the subjects of unlicensed and pitiable jokes, and sometimes the hymn-book and the Bible are both classed together as if they were relics of a superstitious and superseded past. Sometimes the

pastoral heart aches over these things. Things are not what they used to be; the people are not so reverent, devout, or even respectful and personally friendly as they used to be. The Church is now undergoing all manner, not to say of competition only, but of opposition. The devil was never so busy as he is to-day, and people who once would have listened at least with self-controlled decency may now leave the preacher as soon as the liturgy is done. Do not be discouraged; I will tell you something. These joksters make fun of one another behind their backs. Minister, do not suppose you are the only man who is jeered at and bantered and forsaken for some trumpery idol. There are men who make a livelihood of caricature; there are men who would have no breakfast to-morrow morning if they did not joke upon somebody. It need not therefore occasion you distress as if you were the only people that were given up. All the persons to whom I have referred may some day have periods of experience very poignant and very piercing, and the man they will want then will be the solemn man, the serious preacher, the man who knows the doctrine and the philosophy of things, the Aaron who has a right to enter the holy of holies and bring thence some gleam of light, some tone of comfort. Ministers, wait! There are persons who can make light of character; it goes for nothing with them. Character takes long time in building, and its venerableness has no claim upon the puerile miserably frivolous nature. Oh for the times when youth rose up in the presence of age, when the young man would not sit down whilst the elder was standing! We have fallen into frivolousness and irreverence and discourtesy, and the crime is not to be named in one word; find it in any one syllable, and you find the whole literature of the awful malady. It is a going-down in the sense of reverence and moral appreciation and spiritual sympathy; it is a sinking of manhood. You cannot take out of the devil's ground any one little weed and say, This is all. If you find any one weed in the devil's ground it means that the whole field is as bad as that. When therefore you hear of irreverent remarks about age and capacity and character, understand that the country is going down.

What is this age suffering from? Want of discipline. I hear a great deal about making life cheerier, brighter, this and that, and something else: all of which may within given limits be right; but the character that made England, the only England that cannot be shaken, was a character of hard work, labour—a misunderstood and degraded term. Until we get back to discipline we shall not get back to hardihood, to true soldierliness, to the pith that means victory in any contest. It is the disciplinarian who wins, only he may have long to wait for his victory; yet when it comes no man can pluck it from him. If you ministers and non-ministers are going up and down the earth trying what more self-indulgence you can create, and how many burdens you can escape, and trying so to arrange affairs as to invert the old Mosaic ritual, which is the true basis of all true law; endeavouring to turn the week about from end to end, saying, Six days shalt thou have pleasure, and the seventh day thou shalt be partially religious, or the seventh day thou shalt give up to bread-winning,—Sirs, it cannot be done! God is against it. Six days thou shalt labour, and the queenly day, the Sabbath day, will turn all the six into labour in which there is no servility, toil in which there is no degradation. So long as we have false definitions we shall some day want to be the minister of a pulpit which sends all its work out to be done by some other man, and we shall want to be engaged in a species of labour which is done by deputy, the man sending it out taking all the profits, and the deputy being left to gather what he can out of the field of emptiness. It cannot be done. Get back to six days' honest labour, and to a whole noble religious Sabbath, and you will get back the England that was mighty in old times.

Now there are many persons who make light of opportunity. They squander away their chances; they are always here at the wrong time, and they are always there at the wrong place, and they were always just going to do it, but suddenly the night fell, the night in which no man can work. Be on the outlook for opportunities, be on the outlook for the best chances; make every occasion great; make every call a call to a feast, the best feast you can provide; and

if you are going to provide a good feast in your pulpit it will not be you that fail, if failure there is, it will be God, and God cannot ultimately fail.

Such are the beautiful parables. Everything is parabolical if we can get the right view of it. The sanctuary is a parable in stone. It is more than masonry, more than architecture, more than art; it trembles with a meaning it cannot express, it is pregnant with the most beneficent of purposes; the sanctuary, though the humblest little conventicle in the whole earth, is the most beautiful feature on the landscape. No flower so beautiful as God's house; do not let it be desecrated or deconsecrated or perverted. The sanctuary is a parable respecting the kingdom, and kingdom means order, proportion, law, liberty, monarchy. That is the Gospel we have to represent and to expound. The hymn is a parable, however poorly sung; it is not sung to the ear of man, it is sung to the attention of God; and how God lifts up everything, so to say, to His own level! He listens to the little children, and to Him they are all angels; He listens to the poor man who knows nothing about notes of music, and who may be very wrong in some of his accents, but he means the hymn; to mean the hymn is to sing it, to sing it may not be to mean it. See the parable in the whole of your organisation and every function. The very going to church is itself a parable. There is no walk like that which takes a man to the house of God; his very gait has a meaning in it. If you could read that walker as he proceeds from common ground to ground that is to him sacred, you would see parabolic features and suggestions in every attitude and posture which he strikes. Do not be blind observers, and see nothing but that which is merely external. There is character in every figure; there is a meaning in every stride; there is a religion in every look whose object is the sanctuary. Like yourselves, I notice many men and endeavour to read the signs that are written upon their whole figure and action. I have seen a man sometimes with a child in one hand and a child in the other, and going together up to the sanctuary; and I have seen not far away another man, with no child caring for

him or he caring for it, going to the public-house on the Lord's day ; and I tell you there has been a difference between the men in their attitude, in their walk, in their whole action, and I should find no difficulty were the proposition put to me, Which is the better? to find the better in the religious man—never in the drunkard. The drunkard is the enemy of society. We should read the black parables as well as the white ones. Oh the living parables that I see in every walk I take in coming down to this pulpit—the parables of misery ; the cheeks ploughed up into wrinkles of lifelong sorrow ; poor women who have been banished from home and hearth. All these things are bringing down upon the country the judgment of God. Do not let the Church fall into this deterioration ; let the Church of the living God remember that it represents a kingdom and a King, a gospel and a redemption, and let it live its faith.

Until you get back to your principles of faith, the innermost meanings of the divine purpose, you may get up as many twentieth century funds as you please, and they all amount to nothing. Have no faith in gigantic financial manipulation, have no faith even in a self-constructed patronage, have no place to which you must go cap in hand to ask for another dole ; so live your principles as to leave God to supply your necessities, and He will do it. You have never tried Him. Call upon Me, saith He, prove Me now, let faith prove the God of redemption, and there will be a great marriage feast, and all things will be ready. Do not begin at the wrong end of things. Do not begin at the money end ; begin at the prayer end, the faith end, the self-examination end. Let all the Christian churches of every name have a grand twentieth century visitation of one another, conference with one another, a day of humiliation with one another, an audit of all we mean by our professed faith, and let there be a twentieth century day of judgment.

How unpopular he would be who would venture to say so where interruption was possible, how utterly cast out and howled down he would be ! Pelf has still its votaries, and I do not want

to be one of them. If we were right in our parabolical reading of God's kingdom and God's meanings, and if we lived out all these doctrines, wealth would pour in torrents into the treasury. I thank God that since I became the poorest of men I have become through that infinite loss the richest of souls. Not a penny of money have I touched for preaching this kingdom and revealing this pardon; I take it that I may pass it on; not a penny will I touch; she has sanctified it, and to her memory and all she loved is every penny given, and I will not touch a crust that I have bought with the money which I have earned by preaching. I therefore have a right to speak about some of these things, although I dare not tell the whole truth, because fools would not understand me. But I say to those brethren who are in masonic sympathy with my heart, If you are right in your soul, that is to say, substantially right with God, the money will come in, and if it comes in without God you will have riot and confusion and contention over the distribution of the ill-gotten pelf. But how unpopular a man would be who says so! I say it, and say it in the name and fear of God. Faith first, life first, then all these things, poor paltry little dust-heaps, will be added unto you. You cannot change the law. Obey it, and your peace will flow like a river.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, Thou hast considered man ; Thou hast multiplied Thy care towards him, Thou hast surrounded him with the solitudes of Thy love. What is man that Thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that Thou visitest him, when the acreage of Thy universe is infinity multiplied by infinity ? The very hairs of our head are all numbered ; Thou knowest our downsitteing and our uprising, and our going out and our coming in, and Thou dost watch over every man as if he were the only man. God is love ; God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. We rejoice that Jesus Christ Thy Son is come not to destroy men's lives, but to save them. How He could crush us all ! Behold, we are as a vapour before Him, and less than the worm that is under our feet. If we are spared and cared for, loved and tended and redeemed, we are not redeemed with corruptible things as silver, gold, but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ Thy Son ; then how great is man in the esteem of Thy love ! May man rise to the divine estimate and fulfil by divine grace the divine expectation ! Amen.

XXV.

CONSIDERING.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, MAY 18TH, 1899.

“*When I consider.*”—PSALM viii. 3.



HAT is what people will not do. They are thoughtless, superficial, frivolous ; they do not sit down and put things together and add them up, and ask the meaning of the poetry of the total. You cannot get people to consider. God complains of His people : “ My people do not consider ” ; they are like bubbles on the river, a moment seen and gone for ever. They have no back-store of memory and holy recollection ; their line of life is not marked by altar stones ; they live from hand to mouth ; they are always in a panic ; something is going to happen ; we are on the eve—we have always been on the eve—and the eve has very seldom come to anything. People who are always on the eve seldom do much in life ; they go off in evaporation, they flutter much and fly none ; they beat their impotent wings in the air, and build nothing.

“ When I consider ”—I become a new man, much larger, nobler, saintlier. What does consider mean ? I wonder if any six men in any audience could tell the meaning, etymological and historical and parabolical, of consider. It is a word which everybody knows. It is not ; only a man here and there knows what consider means. When you hear it you will naturally, like all intelligent and more or less irresponsible persons, say, Exactly ! of course ! that is precisely what it does mean. But you do not know it now ! It is two words, it is two Latin words ; it is *con* or *cum*, with, together *sider*—what is there in the word *sider* ? Nothing. Take care ! *Sider*

comes a long way up the track of language ; it was born *sidus*. That is what you say when you write your married name ; under it you put *née*, born—another name, your father's name, which you have relinquished in favour of another name. *Sidus* means star ; it is the root of siderial heavens, the starry heavens, the stellar universe, and the like. Con-siderealise—when we star together—put the planets into syllables and words and paragraphs ; when I considerealise, make a lesson-book of the stars ; when I punctuate my discourse with millenniums, then I pray. If men would do this they would be religious, but they are frivolous—"What is in the paper this morning ?" Ah me ! 'tis hideous and disheartening. When I, said the Psalmist, who kept his shepherd's crook in the belt of Orion, when I considerealise, talk in stars and think in planets and pray in constellations—. Reverence is the basis of true character. Little subjects will make little men ; gossip will dethrone an Aristotle. The Christian student, the spiritual philosopher, is called to high themes, to noble subjects, and therefore in the degree in which he is faithful to his star-reading he is a great man.

How this considerealising of things changes their whole aspect, their entire value, relation, and meaning. We do not loop our subjects on to the great cars, so we perform little journeys, and we are no sooner out of the house than we are in it again. We do not outrun the height of the planets ; we are so easily excited by subjects that really have nothing in them. We say in letters as large as ink can make them, A great fire ! Indeed ! it will be the first that has ever occurred. Where was it ? No great fire is possible on the earth, and if you have news of any other planet, name it ! If the whole earth itself were reduced to ashes, it would be but one little handful of hot powder. We speak, of course, of things relatively ; one fire may be very great in relation to some other fire ; a house fifty feet long will be a very great house compared to a hut six feet long ; that, however, is comparing one little thing with another. Who would speak of a great earthquake ? There never was such a thing, except within the limits of the little earth itself ; then it was very great, it almost shook down the chest of drawers in my house ! For a time I thought the

bookcase was going to fall over me; it was a great earthquake! No, a spasm not worth talking about; if the earth had quaked itself out of existence it would not have deserved the epithet great. God is great. Always remember that we speak of things relatively. We read that in some country which we have never heard of there was a tremendous landslip. Nothing of the kind! an anecdote not worth relating; a paragraph made to sell. God is great, and His heavens are as nothing before Him, and the universe is to Him like a dewdrop trembling on the leaf of a flower.

We must therefore get into the right way of thinking about things; we must consider, we must read much in starlight; we must bring the right scale to bear upon the events which disturb us so much, and then they will disturb us no longer. The Psalmist says, "When I consider Thy heavens, the moon, and the stars, which Thou hast ordained," then I get the right view of everything else; Thou hast all the time given me this great object-lesson, and I have never heeded it; I have been going about befooling myself and telling all manner of folly to the people whom I met on the high road; I have buried myself so much in the little anecdotes of time and the small gossip of the neighbourhood that I have lost the geometry of God, and am a fool. We must get back to the geometric measurements, to the stellar spaces, to the all-quieting immensities; then we shall be great, because we shall be in our measure like God.

And when I thus consider, my spirit is tranquillised; a great peace steals over my soul. When I look at death I am disquieted and overborne and impoverished; when I look at immortality, I am young, I come out of my chamber as a bridegroom ready to run a race, like a giant that cannot be tired. Thus there are two views of life, the detranquillising view and the all-tranquillising view. We may spend so much time with death as to think the universe is but a ghostly shadow; we may go to the cemetery so often that we do not know there is a starry road away up into the city whose streets are gold, whose walls are jasper, and the gates thereof like unto a stone most precious. The Lord said to Jacob when he was all but broken-

necked and looking down into the earth as if he were seeking friendly worms and insects, Look up! said God; behold! There is religion in the posture of the neck; the upward look is mute prayer; the eyes that search the heavens for the stars God will reward with a most plentiful harvest. Why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God, count His stars, be familiar with His heavens; hear the man of science who tells thee that, having seen the night-glory, the telescope has found forty thousand galleries such as the gallery which is visible to the poor struggling astronomical instrument; and when thou dost bathe thyself in the rivers of the stars thy flesh shall come again as the flesh of a little child, and thou shalt begin to praise God in a new sweet hymn, and thou wilt become so full of the holy theme as to call for organs and trumpets and all manner of instruments to help thee to sing the praise of Him who is really great. If we would consider, if we would considerealise, put the stars together into shape and meaning, we should have peace, great peace, astronomic calm, divine placidity.

“When I consider” I find that things are not so roughly related and antagonised as at first they seemed to be. I was not looking from the right point of view, I did not get far enough away from my subject, I was in the thick of the battle, in the very midst of the storm of dust, I could not see things in their right relation and proportion; but when I climbed the stairway of the stars and looked down upon the earth and time and measurable space, I said, All things work together for good to them that love God; see how the poor creatures are tossed to and fro, blown about by every wind of doctrine; what panic, what fright, what white-facedness; and how needless is all this disturbance. Oh! if they could see the reality as I see it from these high starry places, all panic would be driven out of their lives, and they would have a peace which the world did not give and which the world cannot take away. Just one stair higher, and the panic dies away, and a sweet hymn of the heart takes its place.

“When I consider,” considerealise, put the stars together, I get time drawn into its right relation or

driven off into its right perspective, I punctuate the literature of Providence properly. Once I thought the first chapter of the Book of Genesis was something to be gabbled over in a morning lesson, now I find it is something that will require eternity properly to read. Some persons tell me that they have read the Bible through twice a year. Impossible! except in the sense of the letter, except in some gabbling sense. The first chapter of the Book of Genesis has required the whole time of the human race to read ever since it was written, no matter who wrote it; the commas are millenniums, the semicolons are great masses of eternity. But we who read so much, and therefore read so little, can get through the first chapter of the Book of Genesis in a few minutes: what wonder if we are troubled by it, and utterly staggered and confounded by it? Take time; between the verses let the river of eternity flow; then you will have no difficulty with the Bible and with its mosaic cosmogony and its marvellous shaping of chaos into poetry.

Consideration, properly defined, is a religious duty. In 1 Samuel xii. 24 you have exactly what I mean—"Consider how great things He hath done for you." Job says the same thing in his own grand way: "Stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God" (xxxvii. 14). Put things together; give God time. You are impatient because you are little poor fussy fools; give Him time. When God says from the throne what Christ said from the Cross, "It is finished," then let the jury return a verdict, but not until then.

Consideration is a great element in wisdom and practical prudence. Sometimes men cannot go to the stars, so God has made some little stars for them to look at. How kind He is and condescending! He says, in effect, The stars are too many for you, you feel a noise in your little heads, and it is not good for you to look at the Milky Way and the Great Bear and the gleaming Orion and the beauteous Venus; so I will make some starlets for you, little living stars, asteroids. How sweet! Hear His voice through the medium of His prophet: "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider"—the same word, with all its stars and Milky Ways—"consider her ways, and be wise"

(Proverbs vi. 6). So you can get the lesson reduced as to mere size; you can have a universe in a microcosm, you can have all creation reduced to a minimum, so that you can see God's meaning and learn God's philosophy. You cannot handle planets and constellations, but you could muster energy enough to put on your coat and go out and seek the ant and watch her little ways. A man studying an ant! Well, you would have it so; you should have studied something greater, and in that something greater you might have included the ant; but a man, with his six feet of stature and his philosophies and libraries and investigations and discoveries and explorations, proud man ordered off to study the ant, and asked to be wise as that little creature is, if he could not be wise as Raphael or burn like the sinless seraph that first broke the solitude of God. Ah! says one, I cannot study the stars. Then study the ant, and "in the day of adversity consider" (Eccles. vii. 14), get what little stars you can together, and make a lantern of them, and see how things are evolved, and touch one another, and approach one another, and flee away from one another, and return; and after looking into that little kaleidoscope, or that small lantern candle-lighted, you will be able to see something that will heal you—you who were meant to be a very parable of God, a comely and delicate woman or a giant ready to run a race. Wherever you are and whatever your circumstances may be, make an orrery of them, a star-scheme, a method of stellar revolution and interchange and relation; and be religious on a small capital if you cannot traverse the planets and pray in firmaments. You have your chance; be wise, take it, and gather wisdom from the flowers planted in the field of God.

Consideration is the only profitable use of history. We find, then, in Isaiah xliii. 18, "Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old." That is the reason why you are so poor, and why you are so easily driven about. You might be rich in history, you might be millionaires in retrospect; you might be wealthier than Dives in the gathered store of providences, deliverances, unexpected visions, touchings of the chain at night, which give you liberty and lead you out of prison into freedom. If we could walk along

this line we should have less whining and moaning and complaining; we should hear more of Ebenezer, more of the helping hand, and we should take the cup of deliverances (translated in the Revised Version the cup of salvation, but literally the cup of deliverances), and call on the name of the Lord. And thus without argument of a futile intellectualism we should drive atheism out of the field, and make it ashamed of itself and blush itself to death.

Consideration is the best use of nature. Consider the lilies how they grow: connect them with the stars, make them part of a great planetary system. Every daisy that grows in the mead requires the whole solar system for its nourishment. If you were to break up the solar system, and return nine-tenths of it, that daisy could not grow. God is one; hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one.

And consideration is the greatest impulse to true piety, as we are taught in Hebrews xii. 3, "Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself." You see, we are driven out of our little selves into the greater self which is the star system, or the system of history or the system of example—the great inference-field. Take your little cross and lean it against the great Cross that held the woe of the Son of God, and you will be surprised what a little cross yours is when you set it beside the Cross of Him who was a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

Consideration is the greatest guarantee of self-control. "Consider thyself lest thou also be tempted." Stars have fallen, angels have dropped out of line; consider thyself. Thy brother has been very bad, most guilty, but it ill becomes thee to make a mat of him and wipe thy guiltier feet on his prostration. Thou art a bad man; not outwardly; thou hast cunning enough, knave! to cheat the magistrate, or to be one. Consider thyself lest thou be tempted. Do not make a garment of respectability for thine own nakedness out of the rags of some other man's vice. If we would consider ourselves we should have less criticism, less fault-finding, less censoriousness. What we want, then, is the spirit of considering, linking things on to one another, linking

them on to the stars, linking the stars on to the Eternal Throne; interpreting the Eternal Throne through the Eternal Cross, the Eternal Righteousness through the Eternal Pity.

Solitude is often necessary to true consideration. God said to the prophet, "Go forth into the plain, and I will there talk with thee" (Ezek. iii. 22). The Bible is full of private conversations, or individual and strictly confidential interviews.

Why not talk with the prophet in the city? Is the city without divine messages? Are the countless throngs upon the city streets very far from God? Not necessarily. God speaks as surely in the city as in the desert. By unexpected events, by labour and strife, by the various fortunes of vice, and the amazing struggles of virtue, God speaks to men with distinctness and solemnity. The point is that busy men may hear God in solitude, and solitary men may hear Him in the city. Change of mere position may have moral advantages. In the great temple of the sea we may offer peculiar worship; in the quiet sanctuary of the wilderness we may hear the softest tones of heaven. This should be insisted upon so as to destroy the fallacy that in the absence of any one set of outward circumstances worship is impossible.

In the text there are three points of deep interest: (1) The speciality of God's appointments. He appoints places, times, methods. He appoints, in this case, the plain. "Where two or three are gathered together," etc.; "Wheresoever my name is recorded," etc. Where the appointment is special, the obedience should be instantaneous, cordial, punctual.

(2) The personality of God's communication: "I will talk with thee." We should know more of God if we held closer intercourse with Him. We may go to God directly. Every devout meditation brings us into the Divine presence. Expect this; believe it; realise it. In the sanctuary we are not hearing the voice of man, but of God. In nature we hear the Divine voice. God talks with man in the garden in the cool of the day.

(3) The familiarity of God's condescension: "I will talk with thee." It is a friend's appointment. It is not, "I will lighten and thunder," or "I will overpower thee with my strength," but, "I will talk with thee," as a father might talk to his only son. Though the prophet was at first thrown down, yet the Spirit entered into him, and set him upon his feet.

Application.—(1) God has ever something to say to man. Must have—(a) as a Ruler; (b) as a Father. His word is ever new. (2) In seeking solitude, man should seek God. Solitude without God leads to madness.

PRAYER.

MOST merciful God, Thou hast brought us together this Whitsuntide, and our memories are stirred with the divinest recollection. This is the day of Pentecost ; we remember the upper room in old Jerusalem, and the gathered church, and the waiting hearts, and we hear now the sound as of a rushing mighty wind coming down from heaven, and we see clouds of glory and tongues of fire and images of blessedness, and our souls are stirred within us because of these great sights. Open our eyes that we may see them all ; teach us that we see nothing by the naked eye, not even the nearest star ; we must aid our vision to see things that are physical, how then can we see things that are spiritual by the eyes of the body ? But the soul has its visual power, Thou dost call upon imagination to look, and behold, and adore. We thank Thee for all upward rising powers, for all things that are sublime and that move in the direction of sublimity, we bless Thee for Thy tabernacle upon the earth, the house of sunshine, the castle of light, the sanctuary of God. May we be in the spirit on the Lord's day, catching the genius of its breath, and answering all its tender and elevating appeals. We live in the joy of the Holy Spirit ; we know no more Christ after the flesh, but we know Him after the spirit, after the heart, after all the meaning of His purpose and His love. May we cultivate this inner vision, and deepen this spiritual fellowship, and become men full grown, complete and honoured, in Christ Jesus the Son of Man. For all elevating and ennobling thoughts we bless Thee ; Thou dost set the thinker amongst us and the prophet and the poet and the man of musical language, and Thou dost draw out our hearts after the higher dreams and the more blessed realities. Save us, we humbly pray Thee, from the dust ; may we leave it, and ascend into the light and into the higher citizenship. We are here because we need something we ourselves cannot supply ; our hearts pant for the living God as the hart panteth after the waterbrooks. Oh satisfy us with Thy lovingkindness, and touch us with flame all that is divinest in our nature. Thou hast promised that we shall one day be delivered from the little, the narrow, the superficial, and the contemptible, and we shall dwell in the higher countries, the highlands of thought and bliss and happiness. We would cheer ourselves with these great promises, and make ourselves strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

Wilt Thou work miracles this Whitsuntide ; when kings and their ambassadors are gathered together in the name of peace, wilt Thou not abundantly prosper their counsels and bring all their deliberations to a happy and abiding issue ? Thou art the God of peace, Thou dost loathe the devastations and cruelties of war. Bless every soul that desires peace, and spoil the counsel of the man who would injure the progress of the world. If any are here who are troubled with great distress, the Lord make this a house of healing, a very Bethel among the rocks, under whose gracious roof there shall be tokens and testimonies from heaven. If any have suffered bereavement and dug some deep grave within the last few days, if any are here fresh from the churchyard, the cemetery, and God's acre, the Lord comfort them with secret consolation and abundantly enrich them with the treasures of His grace. Only God can bind up the broken heart and recall the shattered youth and hope of smitten man. If any are interested in the sanctuary, loving its counsels and desiring to commune with its spirit, may this be the time of revelation and of realisation of great presences and mighty inspirations. And if the fool has strayed in here to find what he may find of emptiness, denying the God that made him, spare him yet a little longer ; mayhap this day he may see the vision that his soul needs ; rebuke not his arrogancy with Thy great power nor crush him between Thy fingers, Thou Giant of infinity, but spare him and be patient with him, and may Thy patience become an argument with him and end in the persuasion of his soul. Look upon the strangers that are within our gates, who have come to tarry with us an hour, to help us in song and in prayer, and to assist us in the communion of study and holy meditation ; to them as to us may this be a memorable day ; may we think of it in the night time, and banish the darkness ; think of it in trouble, and recall Thy strength ; remember it in death, and conquer the grave. Let the Lord hear us for all kings and rulers and monarchs, and all men of influence and power, and persons who should lead the higher civilisation of the world ; the Lord hear us for the sailor on the sea, for the traveller in far-away places, for the prodigal in the bleak wilderness. Hear us for the sick and the dying and for those that are ill at ease. The pity of Thy love is vaster than the firmament. Oh let the tears of Thy pity descend upon hearts that are sad, and refresh and spiritualise souls that are barren of hope.

We pray all this at the Cross and in the name of Jesus and in the power of His blood. Let the Lord answer us with His own Amen !

XXVI.

THE NEGATIVE SIDE.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, MAY 21ST, 1897.

"I will turn aside, and see . . . why not."—EXODUS iii. 3.



HAVE broken up the text in this way that we may see more vividly the special point and largest meaning. Many men turn aside to see why things are; here is a man who turns aside to see why things are not.

God disturbs our little law of continuity,—as if we knew anything about continuity! We were born yesterday, and are struggling to-day, and to-morrow will be forgotten, and we shape our mouths to the utterance of this great word continuity! We spoil ourselves by using long words instead of short ones.

Moses was driving the flock of his father-in-law, and he saw a bush burning, and the bush was not consumed; if it had fallen into a handful of white ashes the shepherd would have passed on, but here is a bush that thrives on fire, here is a bush that blooms into fire blossoms and divers beauties: I will turn aside, and see why not consumed, why not like other bushes that are burning with fire. Why not? There is an explanation of the negative; there is a religion of the not-be; blessed are they who see the wonders of the Lord in all manner of developments, in the common, ordinary, and daily, in the uncommon and extraordinary and the occasional. Blessed are they whose minds are roomy enough to find space for miracles. If man has only one little garret-head, how can he put God's universe in the place of cobwebs and spiders that work meanly in the dark? Why does he not open his head, and let in the light, and be a bigger man and grander? The danger is that we do shut up ourselves

in our little garret churches, and think there is nothing beyond ; if we have not seen it, it is not worth looking at, and if we have not seen it no other man can possibly have seen it. Oh the littleness, the paltriness, the want of width and compass and horizon !

“ I will turn aside, and see why not.” If you saw a river flowing up a hill, perhaps you would turn aside and see why it does not, like all other rivers, flow downhill. If you saw an eagle building its nest in the middle of the Atlantic, perhaps even you and I might be wakened out of our vulgar narrowness and startled by the ministry of surprise. God has a great surprise ministry. We reckon upon our continuity and regularity and sequence, and we mass a few things together, and because they occur and recur we call it logic. God tears our syllogism to pieces, and gives reason another firmament to fly in. Oh ! that men were wise, that they understood these things, that they would believe in other men, in the foreign and the distant and the alien ; for Christ has come into this world to destroy all narrow conceptions of foreign relations and foreign things ; He wants to set up a temple of brotherhood, a palace of peace, and men will not let Him. He will eventually triumph, Jesus shall see the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied, yea, abundantly satisfied. All the rivers shall run into the ocean of His love, and all the lands be united at the centre of His throne.

If we were wise we would more diligently consider the negative side of things. Why not ? Why is not this otherwise ? Why not start the movement from another point ? Why limit ourselves by precedent ? Why live in monotonous repetition ? If you cannot work a miracle, why not be one ? Oh thou poor grinder and rag-dealer and dustbin-searcher, why dost thou not find out the bigger altar and the grander truth and the broader liberty ? Suicide is infinitely better than such life as thine. I will turn aside, and see this great sight—that the world is not converted. Look at its innumerable missionaries, agencies, institutions, colleges, churches ; look what a vast army is working, at least nominally, for Christ ; and the devil is in a numerical majority to-day ! There are more

men swearing than praying ; there are more men who never heard of your God than that inhabit His house and call it their soul's dwelling-place. I will turn aside, and see this great sight : all these good men and holy women and earnest teachers are offering the world redemption, and the world will not have it. That is the kind of sight to turn aside and see. I will not be taken up with meaner spectacles and paltrier sights ; my soul is vexed with these great questions, Why is not the world at the feet of Jesus ? Why is not the Cross higher than any mountain, and higher than any star ? and why do souls ever talk upon any other theme than blood, redemption, sanctification, destiny, service ? We have fallen upon mean themes ; we are agitated by little momentary controversies. We vote one another down ; seven brothers vote that the remaining six brothers are all mistaken, and are all in some sense, that would require courteous definition if we had time to think it out, convinced that the other six are all fools. That is the condition of affairs to-day. And men have views—"my view," and "my theory," and "my conjecture," and "my suggestion." Away ! If you can find any dustman base enough to carry out any bin that would hold them, let him be found, and reward him well. Oh ! that men would turn aside to see the great why-nots that perplex history and disturb the purview and the whole conception even of the Christian and spiritual genius. Will any man arise amongst us and preach the glorious gospel that the world is saved ? He would make a poor living out of his gospel ; he would be torn to pieces by toothless lions. Oh ! for a trumpet tongue to tell the world in all its latitudes and longitudes that it is even now, with all its sin, darkness, and wickedness, lying in the very centre of the heart of Christ, and the devil cannot pluck it out. I love to think of a saved world ; it is my heart's joy to believe that the whole earth is the Lord Christ's, red with His blood and alight with the morning of His smile. To establish that doctrine we shall have to get through a crowd of sectarians and bigots, views and prejudices and conceptions ; the Lord will not be allowed even by His own people to claim His own inheritance ; for He has already redeemed the world, and all the world wants to know now is that it is redeemed. The atheist may

be praying without knowing it; the wicked man may be on his way to heaven without intending it; all men are better than we often suppose them to be. Pray in your own way, think after your own custom and habitude, but never let the mind go down and debase itself and lose its natural majesty, but let it ascend and cry for the light and call for the morning, and sing psalms of spring. I will turn aside, and see why the world does not accept this Gospel and make its own salvation sure. The Divine part has been done, the redemption is an accomplished fact; all that is wanted now is that we should believe it, understanding by believing it the response of the conscience and the will and the love; the whole expressing itself in duty and service and beneficence.

I will turn aside, and see why the wicked are not burned up. I can see them, I can hear the jingling of their golden balances at the bank, I observe them clothed in purple and fine linen and soft velvet; I will turn aside, and see why they are not choked, suffocated, driven off by invisible thongs into a deserved perdition. I wonder what the meaning can be: is it that God's mercy endureth for ever? is it that some priestly soul has prayed, Spare them yet another year! mayhap this year may be their birthday, their obstinacy may yield, and their perversity may be melted into obedience? We do not know what ministries are at work preventing judgment, holding back the bolt, staying the uplifted hand of an avenging justice. The air is balmy with prayer; a whole pentecostal wind comes from hearts that are saying to the living God, Do not yet cut down the wicked, but spare them; in their fatness they will never find Thee, but in their penury and poverty and sharp pain they may call for Thee some day; oh, hold Thine hand! Thou hast been provoked, but it is great to spare, it is divine not to strike; O Thou Spirit of peace, hold back the lightning and spare the city!

I will turn aside, and see why the wicked are not consumed, and I find an answer in the fact that God's mercy endureth for ever, of His love there is no end, and that men may be in reality better than they

themselves suppose. Not what we see in ourselves, but what God sees in us is the real standard of judgment. We are never so near the realisation of the great blessing as when we see nothing in ourselves to deserve it. When we put our hand upon our lip and thrust our mouth deep into the dust, and cry, Unprofitable and unclean! then the kingdom of heaven may be nearer than we have ever known it to be. The difficulties are great, the perplexities are disturbing, and they almost go to the shaking down of what we call faith. Why is not the good man's garden full of flowers? and why do not the flowers in the bad man's garden turn to weeds and rottenness? Why is the bad man trusted with a sickle that he may cut down the corn he never prayed for, and the true suppliant at the Cross is starving for want of bread? I will turn aside, and see these great sights, and inquire into these why-nots; they are mysteries that are open to the reverent inspection and analysis of a tremulous and loving faith. Why does not God reveal Himself to my bodily vision? Because God is a Spirit, and bodily vision cannot see spiritual reality. The dog does not see the stars. The spiritual man discerns spiritual things. Who dare say that God does not reveal Himself to the eyes of the soul, those inward eyes, that marvellous introspective vision, those eyes rich with dreams? Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. What is it to see God? Only the godly can tell. It is not for the vulgar to contradict the godly; it is not for any of us to ride roughshod over the richest experiences of the world. It looks gay and festive, like the rich supper of a bad Dives, to have your champagne and smoke and clatter of earthenware and of glass, and to deny that any man has seen the Lord. Such people would deny that any poet has dreamed or that any painter has seen the inner life of the truth which he paints. I would not go by their rough judgments, they will never lead the mind to any high and quiet issues; I will live the deep, contemplative, yet active life of faith—faith, the sense that sums up the senses and lights them with an unconsumed fire. O my soul! live thou the higher life, drink thou at the hidden fountains.

I will turn aside, and see and inquire why the

departed ones do not speak to us and tell us about the other and upper side of things. Who shall say that the departed never speak to us? What is speaking? Which is the true ear, the ear of the body or the ear of the soul? What are these unexplained noises? What are these sudden utterances of the summer wind? Who can interpret this gospel of fragrance, this apocalypse of blossom, this mystery of resurrection? Who knows what voices sweep through the soul, and what tender fingers touch the heart-strings of the life? Who knows? I will not allow the vulgar man to testify; I would not accept his oath upon anything, much less would I accept it at the altar, the inmost shrine of consciousness. How eagerly we gather round the man or woman who has something to tell us about the other world! If any sweet-minded observer has seen the gates ajar, how we ask with panting breath whether anything was heard through the open door, was any fragrance inhaled, was any thrilling psalm-note overheard? Was that a child's voice I heard in the storm of earth's wild uproar? did I feel a touch on the soul that I could not put into words? Said one to me long ago, "If we are permitted to come to our friends on earth, I will often be with you." Are they permitted? and can they come in the body when they have no body? and yet they have a body peculiar to their new identity, to their resurrection vitality and glory. Who is it that whispers things to the heart? who is it that said, Be brave, take up your work, never stand still till the Master appear? Who is it, was it, how could it be? I will turn aside, and see this great sight, and I will believe that more is spoken to us than the ear of the body can hear. May the Lord awaken the attention of the soul that we may lose nothing of the whispered love of the angels!

What a rebuke this is as a text to all our little notions about cause and effect! We have a great number of little toybooks, little toys that outlive themselves, so to say; so that a great toymaker publishes a large octavo volume to tell you things exactly as they are, apart altogether from the old and antiquated conceptions of the Bible, and we have no sooner spent our half-guinea on this all-revealing volume than we

see in the journals that there is to be a new edition, revised, corrected, and enlarged. The Bible publishes no new editions of itself; it stands there and accepts the translations of the ages; it is a great scheme of transmigration of souls. That is the miracle of the Bible, and that is its glory and doctrine; so that the meaning does not come to us through manifold grammars and verbal disputants, all of which may have their proper value in their proper place, but the great revelation comes to us in unchangeable music, in unalterable majesty of conviction and of thought, and thus the Word of the Lord abideth for ever. But man likes his little toys; he has a very singular double-jointed little toy which he is quite willing to show to anybody either after one meal or another, it does not matter what the meal is as long as you will permit him to show his double-jointed toy, which he calls cause and effect. He would not part with that toy for any money. The Lord is always tearing it to pieces; the Lord is always surprising people by unexpected revelations; the Lord is always perplexing the mind by tearing human calculations to rags; again and again through Pentecostal winds there roars this glorious gospel, The Lord reigneth. Personality is greater than law; consciousness is the true continuity; God is the master, and if He pleases to turn the sun into darkness He will do it, aye, and the moon into blood, and she shall be melted as into a crimson flame.

To me this is a very memorable day. I have been with you thirty years, but this day twenty-five years ago I opened this Bible for the first time in this pulpit. To-day I leave behind me the footprints of twenty-five years in this pulpit. I was five years with you before we had the pulpit; we have been thirty years altogether, but this is the five-and-twentieth anniversary of my occupation of this pulpit. This Bible was given to me by an American divine. Many of the richest, godliest teachers and ministers of the time have stood in this pulpit and told us what they knew of the kingdom of God. Five-and-twenty years! and I have not yet begun my exposition; five-and-twenty years, and I am still at Genesis

first chapter, first verse. I have preached upon every text in the Bible, and I have not yet begun to preach at all. So great is the Book, so manifold the ministry, so all-sustaining the eternal Spirit! Your sympathy is with me to-day. I remember five-and-twenty years ago to-day as if it were yesterday, and they will never come again, and I thank God for it. I would not relive my life for all that imagination could dream—a life of sorrow and pain and cruelty and severe opposition and terrible jealousy and frightful animosity; a life of hard labour, daily toil, and daily bitterness; and yet mixed up with such joys as hardly man ever knew, such tenderness and sympathy and love and co-operation. Oh the mixture, the variety! If I were to leave this rag [gown] on your pulpit to-day, I would thank God that if I have not shed any light of genius upon the pulpit I have been saved from leaving upon it the stain of disgrace. I thank my friends for their co-operation and sweet kindness, and I ask them to watch me as I gently disappear down the hill.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, Thy people perish through ignorance ; Thy people do not consider ; they behold, but they do not see ; ears have they, but they do not hear. Oh that we had been attentive to Thy coming and Thy going in all the spaces and ways of time ! then had we been quiet with a great faith and solid in a confidence which no storm could disturb. But we have not seen Thy going, nor have we heeded Thy prophets, and the psalms of heaven have been lost upon our inattention. Thou hast sent amongst us men having understanding of the times and knowing what Israel ought to do, and behold, they have been stoned by Thy people and killed in Jerusalem. We have not heeded the way of the Lord, nor given attention to all the meaning of the things that are round about us ; we have been foolish before God, yea, we have been blind at midday, and as for the coming and the going of the great souls Thou hast sent to teach us, we have been annoyed by them and have slain them with the sword ; yea, we took Thy Son, Thine only begotten Son, and we did thrust a spear into His side, we crucified the Prince of life ; we sent messages after Him, whilst yet the messages of His own love were ringing in our ears, We will not have this man to reign over us. Thou hast sorely punished Thy people for want of attention and interest in the movements of Thy providence ; Thou hast deprived them and depleted them sorely and driven them out naked and ashamed. We bless Thee for the abiding word, for the living testimony, and the written testimony, and the statutes which cannot be abolished ; men have tried to dig up Thy Sinai and cast it out of the world's geography, but the rocks remain the same, and the commandments which they symbolise are still our songs and our statutes. The Lord give us the hearing ear and the understanding heart.

We pray this at the Cross whilst we behold the shed blood of the Saviour of the world, the precious, redeeming, atoning blood. Do Thou so work upon us by the power of the Spirit that each man shall say, lovingly and gratefully, Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth. Amen.

XXVII.

GOD-SENT MEN.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, MAY 25TH, 1899.

"There was a man sent from God."—JOHN i. 6.



VERY man was sent from God. Fool is he who does not know that and feed upon the fact as hunger might feed upon bread. "There was a man sent from God." The danger is that we look out for the mountains, and miss the valleys where the corn grows. We are all acquainted with great names, outstanding reputations, fames that make all other renown local, if not contemptible. There is a mischief in that kind of knowledge; it is knowledge, rather than wisdom: wisdom is knowledge ripe and fit for the soul's eating. There have always been out-towering men; let them have their place; they have a function, a message, a special responsibility; let all this be recognised: but what of the nameless millions? Cannot millions total up into equivalents to peculiar units? The cypher has a value when it is attached to a whole number, an integer or leading figure. You have seen six cyphers all in a series, nothing to begin with, nothing in the middle, nothing at the end, a row of emptinesses; put the figure 1 at the head of them, and every cypher starts into what we may call individuality and specialty of value. So it may be with men; we have been accustomed to men who could read dreams, to men who have been sent from prisons that they might tell kings what they have been dreaming about. The Lord has made a key for every lock; the king cannot tell the meaning of his own dream or nightmare, so he sends to some nameless prisoner

who must shave in double-quick time and get on what robes he may, to go to the palace and turn dreams into realities. We do not disesteem such men, but there are other men, and they too were sent from God, and sent for no mean purpose ; they were clothed with a special responsibility. We belong to that multitudinous host, and to-day we cry to God to interpret us to ourselves, that the smallest may know that we belong to the mountain and the scheme of the divine purpose.

There is a man in this city, said the servant of Saul, a man of God and an honourable man, and he will tell us what to do. He had become quite an old man ; we knew him as a child, we saw the first little coat his mother made for him, and we almost overheard the first whisper that reached his awakening soul ; to this whisper he answered, "Lord, speak ; for Thy servant heareth." Contrast the child and the old man ; they were both sent from God ; the old man had acquired a great fame, expressed in the words just quoted : "There is a man of God in the city, an honourable man, and he will tell us what to do." We cannot all be Samuels, but we can all be somebody ; the first may be last, and the last may be first, and they that were counted dust and swept off and thrown away may one day rise up children unto Abraham, for God is Father, and He makes His own family. We cannot all turn visions into prose ; we cannot all take up the parable of Daniel, and make kings quake on their thrones and apologise for their very existence. Daniel was a man sent from God. So are you. That is the point I wish to magnify ; not to say, Behold, God made the Alps, but to remind you that God made the pastureland, the land which the plough rips up, out of which the sower gets his bread, as well as that far-away ice that never felt the tooth of the plough. The Lord can save me, even me ! should be the cry and the confidence of every heart. Each soul should realise the specialty of its own case ; every man should know his direct election and designation of God. The Lord has given to every man something which distinguishes him from every other man ; find out that something ; *that* is your business. You are not one of a mob, you have a soul, an identity, a personality of your own ; you can do what nobody else can do just in the same way and in the same measure ;

find out what that is, and do it. That is life. You are afraid of yourself. You are very self-specialising when you are perfectly sure that nobody is within a mile of you, but the moment the next man comes near you so easily drop into cowardice, and further still drop into practical nothingness.

There was a man sent from God, and his name was Sympathy. It is almost a woman's name ; but the true man is male and female, man and woman, brother and sister, and the more woman there is in him the better for everybody. There was a man sent from God whose radiant, gentle, womanly name was Sympathy. He said as he approached our sorrow and our solitude, The Lord hath given me the tongue of the learned that I might speak a word in season to him that is weary. Cannot everybody speak a word to that man? No; sympathy is a gift; sympathy is a music carved out of a special gamut and set to vital strain and expression by the king's son. Few tongues can speak a word in season to him that is weary; they may be kind tongues, well-meaning tongues, well-informed tongues, but they never begin at the right moment, and they never speak with the right emphasis, and they never approach the soul without the soul knowing it until it is in the very midst of the river of love. Some tongues should never attempt to sympathise. They are market-place tongues, they are made to roar in foundries, and amid railway engines and flapping sails of Atlantic liners; useful men, they are indeed men without whom we could not work in life; but they have not the touch that finds the blood, they have not the tone that the heart knows, they cannot speak the universal language of love, tenderness, and redeeming brotherhood. Why will they meddle with the ministry of sympathy? They cannot exercise that function, but they are bold, valiant, dominant, they are full of the spirit of captaincy and leadership; let them exercise that function, for it is a great one, and God will bless its right use. Keep off things you were never meant to touch!

There was a man sent from God whose name was Encouragement, Comfort. This man has a double name, and yet both the names mean the same thing. We mistake the etymology and the religious application

of the word comfort. Hardly a man in a thousand can tell us what comfort really means. Persons hear a certain man, and they call him a son of consolation, they say he is no Boanerges—as if Boanerges was some kind of invention of the devil; Barnabas, say they, was a son of consolation. Oh that such people would not attempt to interpret the Scriptures! Keep off your hands from things you ought not to touch! What is the literal meaning of “a son of consolation”?—a rousing preacher, a stimulating preacher, one who brings strength, one who consoles, not by blubbering over you, but by increasing your strength and calling up your manhood to its best energy. That is a comforting preacher; not the invalid who, hardly able to speak above a whisper, tells you that whatever may become of the rest of the world, you and your family are all right; that is not a comforting preacher. He is a comforting preacher who says, Arise, shine, for thy light is come; awake, awake! get thee up into the high mountains! and who, making these grand trumpet announcements, says, For the Lord is thy strength, and the Holy One of Israel the unfailing river on whose waters of grace thou mayest evermore rely. It is a very disastrous thing to take away these passages from people who have been over-fondling them for half a century, without having the faintest idea of their real meaning. It is very sad when everybody begins to interpret without having been told to do so by Him who wrought the Word mystery, the Logos of redeeming passion.

There was a man sent from God whose name was Insight. The difference between one man and another is that one man can do it and the other cannot. That is all. I would to God that were realised in the Church, in statesmanship, in literature, in the whole range of civilisation. The man who cannot do it may be most industrious and most painstaking and most conscientious, but he always sets the thing that he is setting upside down. It has to be set the other way, but all the philosophers since philosophy was born can never drive it into his head that his way is the wrong way. Yet he is most conscientious, and he is known in his own neighbourhood as a good man, and so amiable. Some men can see and other men

cannot see; some men have lived with their families a lifetime, and they know nothing about the special idiosyncrasies of the members of the family one by one; not only so, they would deny those idiosyncrasies if any observant man pointed them out. Why do they not know that they are blind? If they would come amongst the people as blind persons, why, there is hardly a man in the world that would not be glad to help them across a thoroughfare or lead them to some city of rest. There have been men who have had the great gift of eyes, vision, insight; who could see the inside of things, who could penetrate the very mystery of the atmosphere. God has given them a great place, and they alone can occupy it. Those of us who have not that vision must be content to see trees and stone walls and other things. It is something to be able to see a stone wall; they tell me that some persons have run their poor heads against a stone wall; what a blessing it would have been if such people could have seen the wall, and thus have avoided it! Every man has a special gift of God. Do not let us envy one another. We should all like to be on those highlands and great levels of history and renown and influence and power, but we are better down here. God knows it, God knows when He wants a man to come one step higher. Oh that we would wait for the bidding word! Never force your own destiny.

Now when a man feels that he is sent of God he is fearless. He never thinks about merely personal consequences. He does not say, I cannot go before Pharaoh or Cæsar, because he is a very great man, and I am a very little one; he says to the Lord, If Thou wilt go with me, I will go. That is the true fearlessness; not audacity, not impudence or insolence, not self-exaggeration, but a Moses-like and a Jeremiah-like dependence upon the word of the living God. Said the Lord to Moses, Certainly I will be with thee; says the Lord to every prophet, I will make thy face as brass, thy voice shall be a living thunder, and thy look a destroying lightning; go! It is not the man who goes, it is the incarnate God. When a man is conscious of the presence of God he feels a solemn responsibility; he says, I must take

an account back to the living One at whose bidding I began this sermon; He is watching me, I must not waste His strength, I must not bring His holy theme into discredit amongst the people amongst whom I labour; I must set the Lord always before me; I must have talked over everything with the living One before I go to talk it over in meaner language with the people with whom I am brought in contact. I have got to light a lamp, I will light it as if I was kindling a star; I have only to open a sanctuary door, but I will open it as if it were the very house of my Father, and my Father's eye were upon me in the opening of the welcoming portal; I am but a little one, but I will be the best little one that ever lived, if God will help me so to be; I am not working in my own name or in dependence upon my own resources, I am not inventing a gospel, I am delivering one, and I must deliver it precisely as I heard it, and as I hear it every morning in the sanctuary of my own soul. The man who talks thus is in very deed sent from God, and he will take his life-book back to God, though it be full of blurs and interlineations and alterations; the Lord knows how poor the light was in which the record was written, and how pale the ink, and how nervously depressed the poor hand that wrote the crabbed journal; and God is merciful. He will smile the crookedness into straightness, and when He hands the book back to the faithful steward there will not be a blur upon the page, it will be like a page of sunshine. It is God's most gracious way! A man who is sent from God has no anxiety about resources. The true preacher never wonders what he will preach about this day month; we have nothing to do even with to-morrow. How will the work be done? By the living God. How do you know that all the world shall be covered with the knowledge of the Lord? Because the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. There is an oath at stake, and it is God's oath.

That is where we stand. We believe in providence, we believe in the divine sovereignty, we believe that the tide only goes back that it may come forward. We see in the very centre of things a love that will need the whole firmament on which to write its

messages and all the stars with which to outline its gospels.

The man—laying great emphasis on the article—the man who has been sent from God is Jesus Christ the Lord:—I proceeded forth and came from God; I was with Him when there were no fountains abounding with water; I companied with Him before the morning stars sang together or the sons of God shouted for joy; I am before all things, and by me all things consist. Let us hear this Man, let us shut out every other voice until we have elicited the full music of this most tender pathos. Do listen to His tone. Do not imagine that every voice is like every other voice; listen to the Son of God, never man spake like this Man; and they wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth. He has a word for every soul, He can play upon the harp of every nature, for He made the nature, and every harp-string is the work of His wisdom and His love. Hear Jesus, wait for His coming; do not abandon His church, He may enter His church at any moment. Ah! sad beyond all dreamed misery, to know that when you were away the Lord made a special revelation of Himself to those who waited at His altar and desired His presence.

Up to a given point we need not hesitate to say that there was a man sent from God whose name was Alexander, Emperor of Russia. Looking at all the circumstances of the case, there has been no more useful and possibly far-reaching proposal than that which is now being considered at the Hague conference. No ecclesiastical conference is for a moment to be compared with it. Oh that the Lord would in mercy deliver us from ecclesiastical noise! Personally I have never been able to take a favourable view of Russia; I have always connected Russia with serfdom, ruthless autocracy, persecution, and dislike of human liberty. I believe there is another and better side of the whole Russian situation, and that the better side is being more and more clearly discerned by Western Christians and statesmen.

Beyond all doubt the reigning Emperor has greatly deserved the gratitude of civilisation for the suggestion that national armaments should be revised with a view to their limitation. The Christian sentiment of the world, and that sentiment is omnipotent when it is in red-hot earnest, is on the side of the pacific suggestions of the Emperor. In this holy and joyous confidence we pray that the Czar may not be discouraged in prosecuting the noble policy which he has inaugurated amidst so many inspiring and cheering omens. Perhaps in this matter I have no great following, but I must say, following or no following, that I have taken no part in the frantic cry about Anglo-Saxon alliance. I believe in an alliance infinitely grander; I pray for an alliance as wide as the world which Jesus Christ redeemed; I want an alliance of honest hearts the wide world over. Do not cultivate special graces and pet moralities; do not poison yourselves with the prussic acid which may symbolise to you the very flattering but utterly sophistical notion that God prefers the Anglo-Saxons to everybody else. He does not; He hath made of one blood all nations of men. Wherever you find honest hearts unite with them. Do not let us live a small life, or be clannish, cliqueish, insular, or parochial; let us be human, Christian, cosmopolitan. Let our patriotism go step for step with the grand faith which we at least nominally profess; a great faith and a petty patriotism would be ill-matched and mutually obstructive.

If we speak thus of the great Russian Emperor, what shall we say of the illustrious British Queen? Yesterday she celebrated her eightieth birthday. The telegrams, we are given to understand, might be represented by a long-continued shower of gracious rain. The whole civilised world rejoiced; through every ocean congratulations were flashed, and from many an altar, public and private, there went up the heart-cry, God save the Queen! So say we all. For we love the mother of the world. O Queen, live for ever! I never saw the Queen at close quarters but once, but having seen her once I have seen her for ever. The picture can never fade—of old age irradiated by a young smile; an inexpressible dignity that

could domesticate itself and sit in motherly quietness amongst a few of her children. What history she represents; what prime ministers she has outlived; what battles she has seen turned into victory; what developments of civilisation! Her quietness was not weakness; it was the last expression of power. Looking at her, as I had the rare chance of doing, within a few feet of her inexpressible dignity and comeliness, I felt that I had only to hear her command in order instantly to obey it; no man could say no when such a queen, such a woman, expressed a purpose or indicated a preference. O Queen, live for ever! The empire is thine, and perfectly secure during thy glorious reign. The Queen has made it all but impossible for anybody to come after her.

PRAYER.

GREAT and marvellous are Thy works, O Lord most mighty. Thy servants and prophets did see a great sight ; hast Thou left nothing for us in these meaner days to see? Open our eyes that we may see wondrous things out of Thy law. The greatest things Thou hast not yet shown, yet we seem to have fallen on evil days ; for, behold, we see little but death, the leaves of the spring are hardly here until they crumble and fall under our feet and make way for some new spring. We do not see the great cherub and the burning seraph and the wheel of fire ; we see our loved ones wasting away little by little, growing smaller and weaker ; we hear their panting breath, and watch as it were the outgoing of their final sigh. Hast Thou nothing for us to see that is great and bright and overpowering in majesty and yet gracious in condescension? Have all the great sights passed by? Is there no revelation for us, even for us? Open Thou our eyes, that we may behold wondrous things out of Thy law ; show us that the vision has only changed, it is still a vision of God, a dawn of light, a promise of a summer eternal, an Eden in which there is no serpent. Oh that we had eyes to see! for we read the great letter, the great past, and we are ashamed of ourselves that there is nothing for us to look at but the meanest commonplace of every-day repetition. If Thou wouldst open our eyes and grant unto us the vision of the Holy Ghost, we should see more in a blade of grass than many of the ancients saw in the whole gathering of the stars. Show us that Thou dost not change ; the vision comes and goes, the lights play and interplay and make divers colours upon the dial of time, but Thou, Eternal, art the same when all the ages waste and pass into forgetfulness. God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake unto the fathers by the prophets hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He made heir of all things. It is no cherub or seraph Thou hast brought within our soul's vision, but the very Son of Thy love, the Child of Thine heart, the only begotten of the Unspeakable. Enable us therefore to rise to the dignity of our privileges, and to enter into and claim of right, through the Cross, the grand inheritance of Bethlehem. We bless Thee that we have seen something of Christ,—but too little ; we would see Jesus in fuller figure, in clearer attitude, and would hear Him in more penetrating tones such as find the

heart. We bless Thee for the Son of God, Immanuel, God with us, incarnate Deity, infleshed Jehovah. We worship Him, we adore Him, we bring Him all the flowers of our love and all the blood of our heart, and say, Thou art worthy, for Thou wast slain for us. We gather in Thine house to see great sights; Thine house is larger than all other houses gathered together in one hostelry; behold, there are many houses in God's house, the Lord enable us to stop in one after another and accept the refreshment of its table. We bless Thee for a day now and then in Thy courts; it is a wondrous day, it stretches itself in light over all the darkness and crudeness of the other days; it is the day the Lord hath made; surely on this Thine own day Thou hast spoken to the sun and made it shine with a keener, broader lustre. We thank Thee for resting-places, for lodgments on the road, for hotels built for the soul; enable us to believe that they were all intended as schools and lodgings and resting-places for the education and the comfort and progress of the soul. We bring all our clouds and shadows, the week's tears, the week's bitter misery, the week's intolerable anguish, and we bring the week's joys and weddings and soundings of music and goings of merry feet and chatterings of young throats that have in them a music of their own, and we present all this outgoing and incoming of life, and say, God be thanked that the light is more than the darkness, and that oftentimes in the heart of the melancholy we have found some blossom of joy. We give one another into Thy care, Thou in whose hands repose the universe and all its riches, the angels and all their songs. Help us to believe that there is preparation made for us every mile of the road, and the last mile shall be the best, because it is the last.

We say this at the Cross, "lovely, mournful Calvary," within hearing of the dripping, flowing blood, within the echoes of the cry of the broken Heart; and because we say these things, even in halting, stumbling faith, we believe we shall go home richer, younger, and having in our hearts a tenderer joy. Amen.

XXVIII.

MANY RESTING PLACES.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, MAY 28TH, 1899.

"In my Father's house are many mansions."—JOHN xiv. 2.



WHAT is a mansion? What is the meaning of the word mansion as it fell from those gracious lips? Is the word translated mansion a familiar word in the New Testament? Does it occur frequently, and introduce its subtle music into the common language of the day? Or is it a peculiar word, sparsely occurring on the radiant pages of the new revelation? What is a mansion? It would be difficult, you would reply, to say in one word what it is, but it indicates greatness, fineness, a surrounding estate, an environment of forest or of sea it may be; certainly a mansion is something great, noble, hospitable, having Welcome written in capitals of gold over every portal. Is that your notion of mansion? It is not the notion of the text. How often does the word occur in the New Testament? Only twice. Where is the other place of occurrence? In this chapter: "Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me he will keep my words, and my Father will love him; and we will come unto him, and make our mansion with him, our abode with him." The same word, but so domestic, so accessible, so homelike, so utterly unlike the definition which has just been tendered to us and which in the name of Christ we reject. Our abode, our manse, mansion, dwelling-place, resting-place, our hotel, our guest-chamber. That brings the text very near us, so near us that our nostril can inhale its fragrance, and our eyes though dim with age may catch at least an outline of its charming beauty. Manse is defined as a clergyman's dwelling-place; it is the beginning of mansion. In my Father's house are many manses. Manse, mansa—in low Latin, a farm, a farm with a

field or two, an agricultural place of corn and orchards and gardens. In my Father's house are many stopping-places, resting-places, refreshment-rooms, places where the soul can eat and drink and go many days in the strength of this divine recuperation. In my Father's house are many abodes, many places where you can stop for a night or two, many hostelrys on the sweltering road and the uphill journey; places above whose front doors is, Halt, and rest, and receive the welcome of the Divine love. We thought of the mansions as possible stars; when the stars have been on a grand dress parade, and we have seen as it were all of them, the whole jewellery of God, we have said, Are these the many mansions? We do not exclude that idea, but, confining ourselves simply to the language of the text, we have to deal with another set of ideas, rich in their own way, and of exceeding comfort, and immediately adapted to the woes and the anguish and the misery of all this life of sorrow.

We have, first of all, the home idea—abodes. Where abidest thou? Lord, abide with me: abide with us, for the day is far spent: and He went in to abide with them, to make them for a moment, as it were, His abode; and He turned their simple home into one of God's mansions, manses, farms by the way; and they were glad of it; the house was never the same again to them it was that quiet evening; it burned into a new identity, it glowed into a more infinite and tender significance. The Gospel is full of domesticity. Jesus liked to go into people's houses. Many of us think we have not seen a city until we have been within the walls of some of its homes; then we think we know how the people live, what books they have, what intellectual and social environment they have; and having seen the home-side of the city, we seem to take the city home with us, thus making it ours in a richer and fuller sense than it could ever have been if we had only known it by the topographical map. Jesus went into the house, Jesus accepted the invitation; and when Jesus was come into the house Jesus was invited to the feast, and also His disciples. Jesus abode at Bethany; He had a kind of permanent lodging there.

What if this Man of the home life, who had no home of His own, turned in His inmost heart tenderly and appreciatively to the idea of people living in roofed houses, each with a fire of its own, each with a pillow built against the inroads of weariness? Lifting up the whole idea of our domestic life, He said, In my Father's house are many refreshment-rooms, many resting-places, many abodes; you need not walk too far at a time, because if you know the road, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, the moment you are weary there is the hostelry, immediately there on your right hand, in front of you; and lo! you knew it not. This is God's way; He prepares the hostelry, He gets things ready for the travellers, He builds homes as well as the heavens.

Then we have the pilgrim idea. The picture is that of a man on a journey; the road may be uphill, it may be hot, dusty, difficult; Jesus says, In my Father's house there are many stopping-places, why not stop at one now? And how welcome is the idea of resting when we are consciously and helplessly weary! The pilgrim is about giving up his journey, and a kind, sweet, womanly voice whispers in his ear, You could remain in this house, and refresh and renew yourself, and go on with your journey to-morrow. What music is that! Oh, how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who bringeth good tidings! There is a rest here; to-night we stand within the security of these sheltering walls. But it is the pilgrim idea. Pilgrim means halting for a time, just for long enough to get ready for the next spell of walking; not loitering in the lap of luxury, not writing the word *finis*, as who should say, We will go no further, but will stop here all the rest of the time. Jesus makes no such offer; He says in effect, You are strangers and pilgrims, and you can tarry but a night; by the morning you must be up and stirring and going; to-morrow you may have a ten miles spell, but at the end of the ten miles you will find another hostelry. In my Father's house are many manses, calling-houses, resting-places; tarry for the night; the earlier you rise to-morrow the more certainly shall I know that your rest has been refreshing, and, being refreshed with God's rest, you want to be

going, and to declare plainly that you seek a country; you say, My rest is not here, but yonder, over the river.

So we have the pilgrim idea as well as the home conception. And what is the pilgrim idea but the progressive idea?—walking, running, striving, taking up each day just as it comes and doing the work of the day within the day. Not doing that is where your bankruptcy came in; that is the point at which you fail; you put off Tuesday's work until Wednesday. Whoever does that goes into bankruptcy. Do Monday's work within Monday, and you will be an independent man. Progress of the soul means the daily duty daily done. "Give us this day our daily bread." The word bread does not occur in the text at all, but it is the only word that seems to fit the vacancy. There were missing words long before we thought of the idea; and we think we invented things: whereas we have invented nothing yet. Give us for the time that is coming the coming requisite; give us preparation for the next hunger, the next sickness, the next battle; give us the coming, the coming, the ever coming.

And then we have, in addition to the home idea, the pilgrim idea and the progressive idea, the providential, or all-providing, all-provisioning idea. "I go to prepare a place for you." Send a man ahead, what will that advance man do for us? He will get ready for us, we shall find things done for us when we arrive at the hostelry; everything will be ordered, everything will be according to due arrangement on a large scale of hospitality; and every pilgrim sitting down to that table will say, Why, this is what I like best in all the world; however did this happen to be here? if I had had this table to make myself I should have made exactly this. What do you say? I should say exactly the same: is it not wonderful? Ay; shall we not make a psalm here and call for a harp and ask if there be in the city a minstrel who can sing or play some adequate doxology? In my Father's house are many resting-places, spiritual hotels. And God Himself makes His hotel or abode in our hearts; we will

make our abode with Him. They can do with small furniture, but they want a large welcome ; they do not ask for a luxurious table, the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, but they ask for a cordial reception ; they know the heart that longs for them. Son, give me thine heart ! Rend your hearts, and God will come into them. To this man will I look, to the man that is of a broken and a contrite heart ; we will make our mansion with such a man, our abode, our resting-place.

There are many suitable hotels on the journey of life, every one of which has been appointed by Christ and provided by Christ, furnished, enriched, and made suitable, comfortable by Christ. Do not build any hotel of your own. The reason why you look so tired to death, utterly fatigued and unmanned, is that you have been trying to build your own hotels, and you no sooner got a stone on the top of some other stone than the stone turned to wind and vanished away. O my heart, why canst thou not be content to leave the preparation to God ? The duty is thine, and the walking, and some places are very difficult, but as for what is going to shine upon thee by way of hospitality and benediction round the next corner, eye hath not seen nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what God hath prepared for them that love Him. We should have been so much better off if we had not attempted to build furnished apartments for ourselves. On the road there are some difficult places, we have just said ; it is so on the road of life ; again and again you meet a traveller who says to you, If you pass such and such a way you will have to rough it a good deal. That is a common expression, yet its familiarity has a deep spiritual meaning. There are places where we must rough it a good deal. But, fellow traveller, tell me is it worth roughing ; will the end compensate us for all the difficulty and trouble of the road ? Hear the answer : It is worth ten times what you will have to undergo ; one look from that hilltop will compensate you for all the climbing of a lifetime ; it is a difficult road, very hard, and a most perilous pass, no doubt, but one look, one breath of that healthful air will repair the ravages of a lifetime. In the faith of

this declaration you gather up your strength and proceed for another mile or two ; for the man by the way told you that the difficulty was nothing to the satisfaction. That is what we have been taught to believe in the Scriptures, and by the experience of men who have lived much and lived deeply ; they say that it is worth fighting the devil for the sake of the conquest ; they tell us that one evil spirit overthrown makes it infinitely easy for us to overthrow the next one ; they tell us that duty done is a feast secure, that the rest of the labouring man is sweet, and that if we are faithful on the road God will surprise us with a great welcome at His own hotel.

In my Father's house are many resting-places, places where you can sit down and refresh yourselves, and from which you can go, as Elijah went from the angel-provided feast, fit to walk through any wilderness, and proud with the pride of youth to climb any rocky and difficult height. There are many refreshment-rooms on the upward way. There is one very commodious hotel where I live most of my time ; I have never seen anything like it before ; it is called the Bible hotel. Many guests frequent it ; no guest leaves it in a temper of dissatisfaction ; it is a broad land of wealth unknown, it is a farm of God's own planting and cultivating ; and the corn—the valleys laugh with corn—and the wine, it is a wine for the heart of God, it makes no drunkards, it turns health into higher strength. It is a marvellous hostelry. You can be refreshed and inspired and comforted under its roof on the largest possible scale, and with the freest possible hand, and the more you use the hotel more welcome will you be to use it—and such a prospect ! every window a picture, every outlook a welcoming paradise. Many pass by this hostelry, not knowing the comforts of the inn ; they like a lower class of fare ; they are not wise men, they are persons utterly void of understanding ; they will run into any little paper hut rather than tarry under the sky-lighted roof of God's resting-place.

There is another manse on the road which is less and less frequented. It is a fine old building, though. We used to call it the Sabbath-house. It is in a sad state

of dilapidation now. It has been violated ; when it is lighted up it is always, with a very few exceptions, lighted up with stolen fire, with lamps burglariously secured. It is now a laughing-house, a merry wine-drinking house ; presently it will be a dancing saloon, it is almost that now. We began with music, but we have so fingered the instruments as to suggest dancing, and most of the occupants are dancing now in an informal way. It used to be such a comfortable old house. We have given up its name ; if a man were to call it Sabbath-house now he would be smiled at as old-fashioned and somewhat Jewish in his phraseology. But giants have tarried there ; warriors that have made it a hard life for the devil lodged there ; many a man, not counted worthy by the world's calculation, has achieved immortality by his services within the hallowed walls of that hostelry. We now call it by a heathen name, it is Sun-day. We shall call it something else presently, and many men have hoped that they will get rid of it altogether. Surely there is a remnant left that will regard the day in the spirit of its holiest memories ; surely there are men, hearts, broken hearts, that will not let this hotel go without protest and strife and contention, angry and honest.

Here is a very excellent refreshment-room on the road you are travelling, and it is not so well frequented as it used to be. It is called the Prayer-manse ; that is the manse, mansion, mansa, farm, where people talk to God. Is not that an extraordinary idea ? They do not see Him with the eyes of the body, but I watched the people in that hotel many a time, and they are so quiet, so serene ; their eyes burn with a strange light, they clasp their hands, they turn heads upward to the heavens, and they speak into it what seems to be an infinite vacuity ; but, having done so, they rise and ask for the enemy and dare him to his face. They are more than conquerors through Him who loved them.

There are many other halting-places the names of which will instantly occur to the religious imagination.

These considerations do not exclude the idea of

Heaven. That is the largest, grandest, completest house of all. We do not know what it means, but we will never get there unless we call at the intermediate houses. No man leaps out of perdition into heaven; he advances by degrees, he inquires for the way, and he is told that if he be faithful over few things he will be made ruler over many things; he is told that there is a place where there is no night, no sea, neither shall there be any more pain. And Jesus Christ says, I go to prepare that place for you; if ye loved me ye would rejoice because I say I go: I came in your interests, I have remained in your interests, I am going away in your interests; it is expedient for you that I go away. Believe me, you are living within the environment of a grand philosophy, a great, holy, beneficent purpose; and, believe me, in the end you shall be crowned, you shall be clothed in white raiment, you shall have a new name that no man but your own soul can read or understand, and your eyes shall be opened, and opened so widely, and made strong with such strength, that you will see that the very shadows of the old time have been aspects of sunlight, and you shall see that everything that has happened on the way according to the decree and providence of God has been the right thing, and you shall go and take up as if by right heaven's own song of satisfaction and victory and peace.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, Thou art the great builder. The heavens and the earth are Thine ; except the Lord build the city their labour is lost that build it. Thou hast set us upon a great building work ; may we be as wise builders, who, hearing the sayings of Christ, go forth zealously and lovingly to do them all. For thus will the Teacher Himself compare us to a wise man who built his house upon the rock. We would not build on the shifting sand, we would rear our lifehouse on the eternal granite ; help us to build on the right foundation, and to build with the right material, and to bring on the topstone with shoutings of, Grace, grace unto it ! Thou knowest the difficulties of the weather, the stress of the times, the great peril arising from our surrounding enemies ; but the whole case is open to Thine eyes and to the eyes of the all-seeing dead. Help us to build living stones on a living foundation, and may our whole life be a temple built in the name of the Trinity. We bless Thee for an hour's rest, for sixty minutes of repose amid the rush and the tumult and the uproar of time ; may we use our rest period wisely, may we be stored with strength, may the Holy Spirit take of His own word and repeat it to our hearts, so that our hearts can hear every whisper-tone of His strange, mighty voice. Restore Thou them that are penitent ; behold those who are contrite in heart, kneeling at the Cross of the Saviour and crying to Him alone for pardon. Oh that this cry may be heard in high heaven Thy dwelling-place ! and when Thou hearest, Lord, forgive. Amen.

XXIX.

NOT ABLE TO FINISH

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, JUNE 1ST, 1899.

"Not able to finish."—LUKE xiv. 30.



HAT which God in the person of His Son condemns in others He can never permit Himself to do. Thus we gain as it were unexpectedly a sudden but clear and large vision of the method of God. It is infinitely profitable to turn the parables into their divine as well as their human applications. We did not expect to see God so clearly self-revealed. Let us look at the case. It is a figure drawn by the greatest Artist, more beautiful than light, more mystical than the sacrament of the rainbow.

"Which of you," said Christ, "intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish." Jesus Christ practically led the laughter of the world against the fool who began something which he could not end. It was a case of bitter taunt and mockery. If the man had done nothing, nothing would have been said about him, but he began to build and left off half done; took away the scaffolding and left the ruin. That is Christ's own picture; we want to apply it, in the first instance, to God. He who buildeth all things is God; men are only under-builders; square and compasses and triangles are all divine revelations, and man was taught how to strike the stone into shape and into music. It is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. The point to

which I want to fasten down, so to say, the Divine Teacher is this, that if God mocks the man who began to build and was not able to finish, how He must laugh Himself into destruction if He began to shape the universe and could never fill up the outline. Behold a God who began to build and is not able to finish! Gather all His stars together and all His glittering points and all His confused material, and shape them into an epitaph, and bury Him under the slab, and let any who survive read these appalling words, This God began to build and was not able to finish. Call for another God, for the universe cannot be left uncompleted. Blessed and ineffably comforting is the word that God means to finish what He has begun. In simple consistency He cannot help it. He laughed at the man who began a tower and was not able to finish it, He will not give that man his turn to laugh at Jehovah who has done the same thing on an infinitely greater scale. Now we shall have the promise written as a big amen.

It is impossible to think of God creating man as we know him—that is to say, as we know ourselves—and allowing that man to end in nothingness. That is the doctrine I have been longing for so much during a lifetime, and so intensely during this year of desolation. I knew there must be a text somewhere that would teach that doctrine, and teach it in its broadest aspects and represent it in the clearest light. The Divine parables are re-incarnations of God. The parables illustrate God, and only help man secondarily and intermediately. The great purpose of the parables is to tell not what man is, but what God is. Every parable is a shaping and an accent of the kingdom of God. Here is man, as we know him, so abject, so august; he has thoughts, dreams, poems, philosophies, high purposes, noble ambitions, a heart that is like a golden fountain of love, and God made him so; and it is all going to end in smoke and nothingness! Never! The parable of the text is against that theory. God does not make men that He may mock them. God never said, I will make man so sensitive that he will feel the breath of the softest zephyr; I will make him so responsive to the thousand influences which play upon the harp of life that not a string of his wondrous

harp-life shall be dumb, and after I have prepared him in this manner, and made him so delicately, and so responsive, and so capable of agony, I will throw him away, I will dash him to pieces. That is blasphemy; that is unthinkable. Did God say, I will make man take a great interest in myself; he shall call me God, and build an altar to me, and represent me as dying in my Incarnate Son for the sins of the whole world; I will delude him with the idea that he is the temple of the Holy Ghost, and tell him morning by morning that the Holy Ghost dwelleth in him; I will feed him with all this spiritual food, and when I have helped him to the utmost extent, so that he calls me Abba, Father, and his voice is heard like the bleat of a lost lamb on the mountain-side, then when I have brought him to this point I will spit upon him, and order him away, and cast him into the impenetrable smoke and darkness of the everlasting vacancy. No; I will cling to my little parable, I will remember that Jesus told me that it was customary for men before building a tower to sit down and count the cost thereof, and to see whether there was money enough to finish the tower; He told me that if any man did not pass through this process of preliminary consideration, if he began at the tower and left it half-built, the world would mock him, laugh him to scorn. When my heart dwells upon that little parable the Spirit says to me, It shall be even so with you; if He has begun you, He will complete you; He is pledged to the end by the beginning; if you have ever so little life in you, it means immortality, heaven, everlasting education and beneficence. Then says the trembling soul, I know that I have some light, not much, only a flickering pulse, but there it is. Then the Spirit says to me, A bruised reed He will not break, the smoking flax He will not quench; faint yet pursuing. Behold the finished heavens, and in them read the higher meanings begun with these firmamental lights and spaces and proportions, and regard them typologically, for even so will God fill His household with lights, living lamps, redeemed glories. That voice fits my aching need; I feel sure that it is true. God does not hang Himself up in His universe to be laughed at as the God who began a man and built only his feet, could not reach to his head, much less put a

crown on the man whom He had created. This cannot be; the whole shuddering universe, appalled with his black blasphemy, says, No!

It is impossible to think of the Bible reducing all its own promises, oaths, assurances, consolations, to falsehood or mockery. Not perdition itself has fire enough hot enough to burn the book that has so misled us as the Bible has done if its oaths are lies and its promises are illusions. Man cannot be brought in that agony to regard the lying Bible as a mere effort in literature, the brightest and most exciting of the romances. The true heart has never read the Bible in that sense; the true heart has regarded the Bible as sent from God, written by God, pledging God to a ministry of love and redemption, of righteousness and judgment; and woe to the man who shall say to the agonised heart, God did not mean it, it was only to cheer you a little through the darkness of the road; it is romance, it is word-painting; what you are going to do, dear dying friend, is to be coffined in darkness, and buried in nothingness, and forgotten. That cannot be; it cannot be that the Christian is going to die into nothingness, to die in the arms of a lie. Think what promises and oaths and covenants have been given to man for his solace and direction and daily maintenance amid the stress and the horrible difficulty of time! Are they all to come to nothing? It would be worse, infinitely worse, than that of a man who began to build a tower and left off ten feet high because he had no more resources and no more skill. And the God that spake the parable is Himself to repeat the folly! It cannot be. What ruin, what betrayal of the trusting heart! What God could face the avenging mother. Hear her; she says to Him, You told me that you were as a shepherd that carried the lambs in his bosom; your Son said to me, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven; you told me that the angel of my child beheld the face of the Father that is in heaven; and are you going to turn this child back into nothingness? you are worse, infinitely, infamously worse than the man you laughed at, who, poor, uncalculating creature, began to build and was not able to finish;

what right had a God like you to laugh at a man like that? Every instinct is in favour of the Bible. The heart at its best re-writes the book of God; the soul in its direst need, feeling the approaching hand of strength and recognising the dawning of the higher light, says, That must be so, that is the kingdom of God; we have not believed any cunningly devised or any clumsily contrived fables, but in the living God, whose word is an oath, whose promise is heaven begun. Shall it be that the grave shall be the only triumph of the world? Can it be that God's acre is the only acre that carries flowers, and that the flowers are all coloured poisons? If there is any truth in intuition, in instinct, in the monitions and suggestions of the soul in its highest noontide of realisation and conception, all these are in favour of the fact that God will complete what He has begun, and that we need not ask any questions about the conclusion because we are sure that only He initiated and founded the great suggestion and the solemn temple of life.

This reflection has been bread and wine of love to me in the darkest temptations and the weariest nights of distressed and taunted patience. Yet if I left the subject here I should accuse myself of trifling with an opportunity which Jesus Christ Himself created for me. We have used the parable, so to say, inversely; we have stopped the great Teacher and told Him it was no use His proceeding further along a minor line if His own parable were not true in its very highest and sublimest application. The heart interrupted the Speaker, not with criticism, but with overflowing and uncontrollable thankfulness.

What, then, is the literal and human application of the text? That application is made glowingly evident by the very wording of the text and the context. Jesus Christ is speaking about people following Him; He lays down severe regulations upon this matter: If any man come to me, and hate not his father, mother, wife, children, brethren, and sisters, yea his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. Then I must think further about this. Precisely so, Christ replies; that is exactly what I want you to do: and what man of

you, thinking of building a tower, would not do exactly the same thing—sit down and count the cost and turn over the whole case in his mind, and see what his purpose is and what his resources are? Whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. Then I must think further about this matter of discipleship; read the words to me, if you please. Whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple: sell all thou hast, and give it unto the poor, and come and follow me: lay down your purses outside the gate; strait is the gate: I tell you these things before you accept my name and profess to be interested in my cause; hear me, and accept the responsibility of the decision: If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. May I not be partly Thy disciple and partly another man's disciple? No. May I not compromise upon some of the points? No. Then I will call for Thee when I have a convenient season. And Felix never finds that season. Do understand the conditions, do face the consequences—empty pulpits, empty pews, deserted sacramental tables, an abandoned temple and altar. Is that so? That is so. Until that is believed the Church can make no progress. Christian life is not a theory, an ingenious conjecture as to the answer to a conundrum; Christian life is cross, self-sacrifice, suicide, self-obliteration. I thought it was having certain opinions. No! I thought it was attending a favourite minister at least once a week, and leaving my seat in the church to be occupied by some poor person when I was not there. No! I thought it was ability to repeat a catechism from end to end, and to be able to detect some other man's catechism that did not say exactly what my catechism said. No! Who, then, can be saved? That is the question. I cannot—unless God's love is greater than my sin; unless God take some deep sigh of the heart as the true theology; unless God interprets my hot tears into grand intentions which I am strenuously endeavouring to carry into effect—then even I, chief of sinners, may be saved. A pitiable condition the Church is in to-day; by the Church I mean all the communions which gathered

together would represent the incarnation of Christ. We are differing about the wrong things; we are energetic even to fussiness at the wrong points. We want to print God, we want to put the whole heavens into a catechism, we want to treat the whole tragedy of incarnation and revelation and human education by dialogue, one man asking a question and another man answering it from his memory of a dead book. No! O Thou who didst create prophets in the olden time, send us a man willing to be murdered, who will save us from our own folly, and from pursuing our own sectarian, bigoted, foolish and mortal prejudices.

Now Jesus Christ says, Take care what you are doing in replying to me; understand what I have told you about the cross and about the strait gate, and do not be numbered amongst the foolish people who have begun to handle the plough, turn back, and leave the furrow but begun. No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of heaven. Before you touch that plough hear me again: If any man come to me and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple: let the plough alone until you have thought out this; then go to it, and I will go with you.

Returning in one final sentence to the Divine side, we are assured that there will be no failure on the part of God. Being confident, said the Apostle, the most heroic of all souls, that He who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ: Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His; he that endureth unto the end shall be saved. There is sustenance on every mile of the road, there is comfort for every condition of life, there is ample preparation made for all the changes of the case; be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life. Be there when the crowns are given out!

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, Thou hast sent to us a great message for the healing and restoration of the guilty heart. This is Thy gospel, the good news of Thy love, the music of Thy pity. Thou knowest our frame, Thou rememberest that we are dust ; we have done the things we ought not to have done, we have left undone the things that we ought to have done. Yet Thou givest us bread in the wilderness, Thou receivest the cry of our murmuring as if it were the prayer of faith. Thou knowest our necessity and our helplessness and our utter dependence upon Thyself ; Thou wilt not forsake the work of Thine own hands : what sculptor would throw away the bust of his own chisel ? Behold, Thou hast made us, and not we ourselves. We are still Thine ; we have broken Thine image, we have corrupted Thy purpose, we have despised Thy pity. Still we are Thine, and if we confess our sins Thou art faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Give unto us the holy wisdom, the grave understanding, the sober-mindedness which builds itself upon the rock, and save us from the little-mindedness and impious frivolity which would build its house upon the sand. We thank Thee for all holy words, for all noble music, for all tender gospels, that find the heart in its gloom and pain and bitter necessity. For all these great gifts of God we must go to God's own house. We have come to the altar by way of the Cross, and we have come to hear Thy word that we may live thereby, and lift up our heads as strong men and as hearts whose confidence is in the living God. Save us from all darkness and littleness and mean infirmity ; deliver us from self-trust and self-worship ; may our hearts go out after the living God as hunted beasts pant for the water. Oh that Thou wouldst hear our panting and listen to our yearning after Thyself, and give us great answers in the water of life ! If Thou hast shown any of us great and sore trouble, surely Thou wilt revive us again ; if Thou hast torn us the first day, and the second day, surely on the third day Thou wilt bind us up again ; hast Thou not always worked wonders on the third day ? Hast Thou not set the days in a wondrous series, and is not the third day Thine, and the seventh day, and the first day by the token of its open grave ? If any man has been drawn nigh to the borders of death and is in Thine house to-day, behold how his heart over-

flows with love, and grant him this morning a new token as between yourselves that Thou art true to thine oath and Thy covenant. If any are struggling for light and peace and liberty and God ; if any have seen how little the world is, and how much grander the soul is than any space that can enclose it, the Lord grant unto such new visions ; may they be in the spirit on the Lord's day, and may the little isle of Patmos stretch itself out further than the firmament. The Lord help us to be wiser men, truer, better, simpler altogether in motive and in purpose and the entire method of life ; and may we build ourselves on Christ Jesus, who is the express image of the person of God. The Lord help us in all this wondrous little life of ours, so short, yet so long ; an hour flying away, but digging pits in the heart full of darkness, the very abodes of sorrow and misery that cannot yet be relieved. If any man has been living the unwise life, trifling with God and duty and destiny, may the fool stop now at the call of Thine arresting voice, and to-day may he shed his folly, and resume it no more. We give all our sick-chambers and sick folks into Thy care and keeping ; Jesus, physician, healer of broken hearts, the learned One whose tongue can speak a word in season to him that is weary, look Thou upon this world of misery ; it is full of sorrow and heart-ache and grief that may not be spoken. Yet we look at the Cross and we are made glad ; we compare our grief with Christ's sorrow, and behold it is as nothingness ; we look upon His infinite woe, and thus relieve our temporary distress. The Lord help us in all things ; make us forgiving, tender, sympathetic, mutually helpful, remembering that it is not our kindness we shall regret when we come to gather up our feet.

Let the Lord come down from heaven that He may listen to us ; for we pray at the Cross, at the altar of the Atonement, in presence of the all-cleansing blood. No prayer of the heart can perish at the foot of the Cross. Amen.

XXX.

SPEAKING IN THE WRONG TEMPER

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JUNE 4TH, 1899.

"I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul."—JOB vii. 11.



THEN he is sure to get wrong. He has already made the vital mistake of his whole harangue. He has given himself away; he is in the wrong mood; he is in the mood in which a man should shut his mouth. But that is the last miracle of grace. He will be eloquent enough, alas! too eloquent. Grief has a rhetoric of its own, but it should be spoken to one hearer who can understand it and pity it and forgive it. Have no fear of the eloquence; yet there is an eloquence to be feared. This Job will get wrong to-day; he has opened his speech in the wrong key; "anguish" and "bitterness," what can these tell of the mystery of God and the tragedy of life? There are times when we should run away from ourselves. There are burning hours in which the evil spirit says, Speak; do not refrain from speaking; you are now in a high state of inspiration, make a clean breast of it, tell exactly what you think of the shameless injustice of heaven. There are times when we should be eloquent with dumbness. No commentator upon God and the universe can be just who speaks in anguish or in bitterness or in a tone of complaining. The speaker has in the very first instance disqualified himself, he has disfranchised himself, he is for the moment no longer a citizen of the household of God. Emotion may overwhelm reason; excitement may depose justice; we speak most reasoningly and justly of God when we dismiss poor speech and take to sighing and sobbing and floods of penitence. Yet how strong is the temptation to allow the fever to prevail, and when our

temperature of soul is much beyond normal, how prone we are to speak, and to play the fool ! Blessed was that man who said, I was dumb because Thou didst it. The rhetorician of the text was infinitely grander when he said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Not every man can say that at once; he wants time—a year, ten years, ten centuries; but he will say it in the degree in which he is really pious, filial of heart towards God; grounding himself on the eternal covenant, and living in the spirit of the Divine oath. Give him time; let the man swallow down his spittle; there is a doxology yet in the throat of Job. We do not know what we are doing when we are talking. There is a wonderful Talker in the first chapter of the book of Genesis; He simply said things, and they rolled themselves out in flaming orbs or throbbed in pulses of immortality. He said, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. We may not laugh at this. Science said the same thing yesterday. It took science a long time to get round to that point, but then science has no wings, it has to walk all its journey, and it sometimes gets tired and loses its way, but in the degree in which it is right of heart it will come right in utterance; and yesterday science re-wrote the first chapter of the Book of Genesis. He said—it was done.

Have I not sometimes quoted to you from the wonderful book of Professor Tyndall on the mysteries of sound? He wrote a large octavo volume on that one subject. The title of the book is "Sound," and we learn from him, and from those who teach with equal authority and equal luminousness of mind, that this saying and creating are going on now, and the first chapter of Genesis is just being printed: it never can be finished. What did the great scientist tell us? He told us that he had spread a little liquid paste over a certain surface, pinned it at the four points, got a great singer to sing songs over it,—and it was the first chapter of Genesis over again! One of the sounds became a daisy; another a thorn; another a noble lily, nodding its graceful head as if in response to the charming voice. If that is possible, the Bible may after all be right! He said one note, and the little paste trembled into a daisy. Observe I am quoting

now, and quoting from a high authority, and quoting literally. She sang, and there was a thorn; she sang more loudly and sweetly, and a white lily came up and nodded to her as if they were old acquaintances. He said, it was done; He commanded, it stood fast. So much, therefore, depends upon what we say. I was reading only this morning that some chemists have discovered substances so sensitive that if you speak to them you change their colour and change their shape. He said, it was done. Why should the people have their little toys in scientific experiments, and I should suffer my Genesis to be cut away from me as archaic and superstitious? Everything is coming round to Genesis; the Bible is being re-written every day; you will all come back to Church yet, and God shall have His day—a bright, calm, festival day, the hosanna of the week.

Better, therefore, not speak in anguish and in bitterness and in high excitement; better not lose self-control, but calmly, bravely, hopefully wait. All things are coming round to the Bible, and many of them to the Authorised Version. So much, we have just said, depends upon speaking. We ought to be very careful how we speak. If a man can so speak as to change the colour of some substances and change their form, what wonders may yet be wrought by prayer! What if he is right who says the whole universe, so far as we understand it at all, is a gigantic phonograph, and there will be a great repetition, a coming back upon the soul of its own words and music? What if that is right? Then where the canting, whimpering fools that want to buy our Bibles in a job lot, and rid us of the theological fudge? Time is on the side of God, of truth, of revelation. What wonders may be done by speaking! We might have beaten the air into a turnpike right up to the eternal throne: why not walk that old way and pluck its flowers by the roadside, and halt, and look over the sunny landscape, and pause and listen to voices from the unseen and the ineffable? Verily, I seem to be re-ordained to this ministry every day because re-converted to God by every page of His providence which I accurately read. My soul's confidence is absolute that all things will be brought into a grand amen in Christ Jesus the Son of God.

You do not know what you have done for your house by much speaking to God in it. You may not have seen the answered prayer; your household is the larger and the lightsomer and the more homelike because of the prayers which you have prayed when you have shut the door and spoken to your Father in secret. The prayer has killed the bacilli. If a word from a human throat can change the colour of a natural or material substance, who can say out of the range of his boundless ignorance what may be done by a sigh, a cry to the living heart of the Infinite Pity? Go on with your praying; pray without ceasing; you are changing the very form and fashion of the earth by it, you are enlarging the place of summer, you are enabling men to pull down their barns and build greater; for it was your prayer that made more golden the gold of the harvestfield, that made ruddier the redness of the rose, that made brighter the light of the garden.

Many persons have spoken not out of anguish and out of bitterness but out of prejudice, bigotry, ignorance. They have spoken when they ought to have been silent; they have mistaken a form for a power, an environment for a genius or a soul. They have never been in the holy of holies, they talk about bark and shell and crust and phenomena—a word that has nearly been the death of them! They have not talked about soul, inmost meaning, ineffable intent, the yearning of the mother-pity of God.

Have you read the Bible with a view to ascertaining how many people have put themselves under discipline in regard to the uses of speech? The Psalmists were great in this matter; they talked little, they sang a good deal. There is no controversy in music. All the congregation has gone half-mad over the sermon, because it was full of opinions and doctrines and dogmas and creeds and catechisms and citations and illustrations and footnotes and marginalia, but that same distracted congregation rose like one man to sing "Praise God from whom all blessings flow!" Many persons have read elaborate papers to one another until not a soul in the audience had the faintest idea what any other soul was thinking about, but that there was a general sense of confusion in the distracted air; yet

when one senior brother said, "Let us pray!" I have seen a whole host on its knees absolutely unanimous. What wonder if the Apostle said, "Pray without ceasing"?—being on your knees, keep there. The Psalmist said in Psalm xvii. 3, "I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress." That was wiser than the speech of Job. Yet even in that speech there may be a subtle temptation; we may hold our tongues too much on purpose: as who should say, Look at me! I am not speaking, I am the embodiment of wisdom, I am the incarnate self-control. So much depends upon motive, and motive is so far in, in, in. Who can follow it, and determine its range, intensity, and moral value? In Psalm xxix. 1 the poet says, "I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue; I will keep my mouth with a bridle while the wicked is before me." Take care the wicked man does not notice the bridle! keep all the machinery out of sight; do not enter into his presence an obvious misery, on your mouth and nose a net, a bridle thrown over also, and the bit champing in your mouth, and say, I could tell you a great deal, but I won't! Let no bridle be seen. That is the perfection of self-control, to burn without scorching anybody else; to be really composed, and yet in your very soul to be in the midst of a battle with evil and with yourself.

How will the Psalmist accomplish all this? He will accomplish it by the only way, he will accomplish it, that is to say, by prayer:—"Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips" (Ps. cxli. 3). After prayer, go forth; then, when all is right, proceed, advance, and a little one shall chase a thousand. The gravity of true religion is itself a mighty weapon.

Will God allow us to recall some of our words, to amend them, to expand them, to modify them? I take encouragement from the example of my Saviour:—"And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly." We should not have thought that possible, but it was not only possible, but actual. There is a pressure heavier than the other pressure; there is a pressure that gouges, forces the life-blood out of you, the last drop, and turns it into a red word, a crimson syllable, a mighty speech with which to assail the heavens.

There are second prayers that swallow up first prayers. We grow by praying. First give God an outline of our desire and our wish, and then we, gathering wisdom from experience, go back and amend by expansion our own prayer. "He prayed again a second time." Job may have done this. He spoke in anguish and spoke in bitterness, and complained because his grief was intolerable; perhaps by-and-by he calmed down, and saw the Divine movement from another standpoint, and beheld it with another mystery and interpretation of light upon it; and who knows what he said when that aurora glory beamed upon his trouble? The Psalmist had no lack of topics. He says in Psalm lxxi. 24, "My tongue shall talk of Thy righteousness all the day long." That would exclude all unworthy speeches; nothing could enter into that sanctuary of eloquence that was not worthy of its walls of gold and its roof of crystal. He gathered strength as he proceeded, and therefore he said in Psalm cxix. 46, "I will speak of Thy testimonies before kings." A kingdom for a stage! He who has great subjects rules all other subjects into order and into comparative relationship and value. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all other things will fall into their places. Do have a plan, do work from a centre, and do not try to make a little square and a new pair of compasses of your own; the square and the compass and the triangle come before time came away up from the God-built house of the infinite solitude. The subjects are all marked in the Bible. Pitiably it is to me—am I very bigoted and narrow-minded?—when young preachers go out of the Bible to find subjects and texts. Oh, heart-breaking to an old minister of the Book and the Cross when young preachers have to go to new novelists and recent poets in order to find something to talk about! Isaiah is not exhausted; the Gospels have not contracted their sphere; everything worthy of human attention is to be found within the four corners of what we believe to be the inspired Word of God. He is an empty head and a false heart, and mayhap a budding Iscariot, who lays his Gospel aside and goes to the circulating library for the last poet, that he may find a text to hang a sermon on. I will speak of Thy testimonies all the day; Thy word is my meat and my drink; Thy word is sweet unto

me, ay, and as the honeycomb. You will not read the Bible. I speak to those who have complained of the poverty of preaching and the poverty of the resources of the sanctuary, and not to those who love the Word and live upon it. Speaking distinctly to the class I have indicated, I charge them with not reading the Bible, not swallowing and digesting and assimilating it. This is the true bread that cometh down from heaven ; if a man eat of this bread he shall never hunger.

Let us learn, therefore, a lesson from Job not to speak in the anguish of our spirit or in the bitterness of our soul ; and let us learn a lesson from the Psalmist, who says he has made God's Word the man of his counsel and turned the statutes of God into songs in the house of his pilgrimage. In the old, old time when the days were sunnier, they that loved the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written. Read the history of the whole Church of Christ, and you will find that it was nourished upon the Bible, fed upon the Divine Word, and that it nestled itself in the bosom of God.

It seems fitting to add that we should take care always to remember the mood in which men speak to one another. We are not to make men offenders for a word. The Psalmist said in his haste, All men are liars. In the interpretation of our family life we should never forget that many things are said which are not to be taken in their literal and prosaic sense. It is difficult to set a bridle upon the tongue, and to guard the mouth as with the bayonets of sentinels. Many a time a man has desired to recall his words even within one moment of having uttered them. God knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust, and He will not be heavy upon us, for His mercy endureth for ever. On the other hand, we should be careful with extremest care not to grieve the love which has done so much for us, and which was, indeed, prepared to die in our best interests. There comes a time when we cannot recall the unholy word, or undo the cruel blow, and we should remember that when we come to our closing hours it will not be our words of sweetness that we wish to recall, nor our

deeds of love that we wish to undo. The same great rule should apply to religious thinkers and speakers; we should make an abundant allowance for them, remembering our own varying moods, and our own temptations to speak suddenly when silence would have been golden. We should not hastily commit ourselves to dogmas and opinions, which we may live to change; and in estimating character and confidence we should steadily bear in mind that we are all apt to speak under the influence of sudden impulse, and to make declarations which we have not taken sufficient time to balance and determine. We shall never err if we adopt a policy of forbearance and large-heartedness, for surely the wisest men are but fallible, and in experiences of anguish and bitterness they may say things which they would not repeat in calmer moments, or in less troubled times.



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